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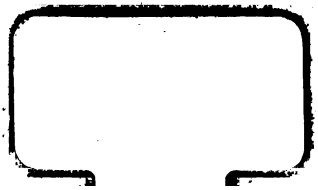

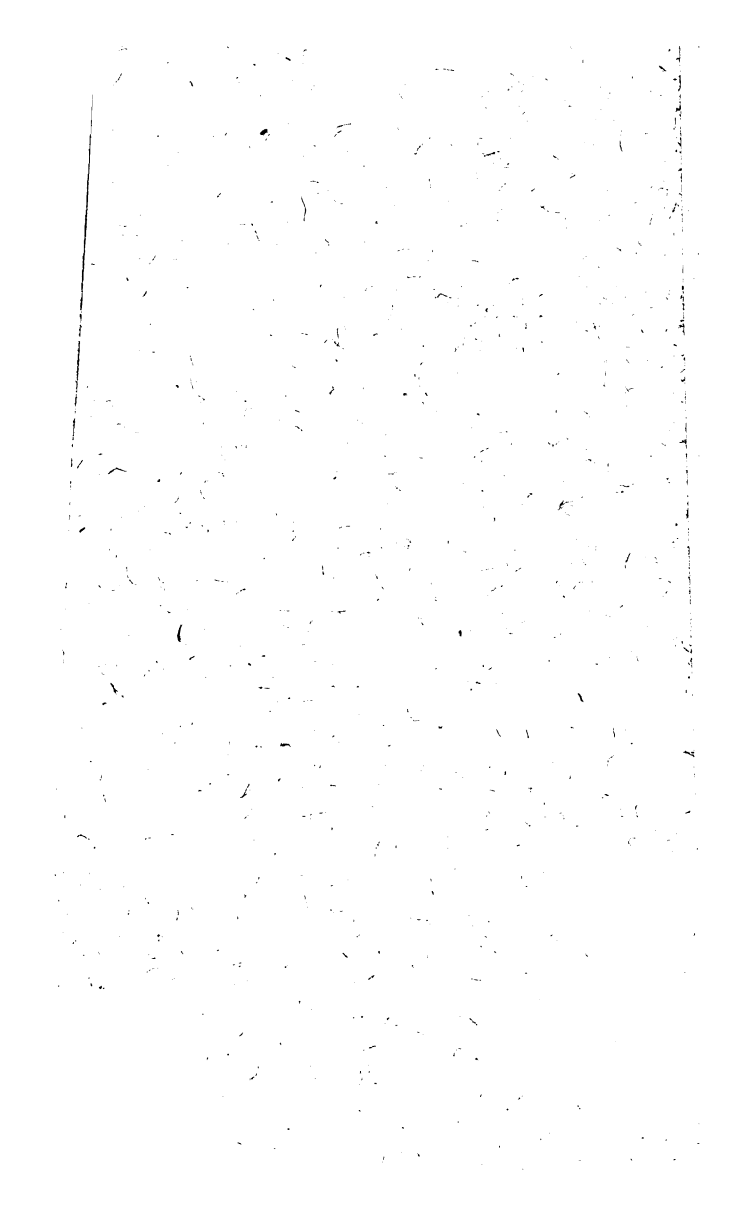

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OF

POLITE LITERATURE.

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ANECDOTES

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POLITE LITERATURE.

SECT. I.

Of TRAGEDY.

THERE is no ſpecies of poetry that has occaſioned ſo many criticiſms, and given riſe to ſuch a multitude of rules, as tragedy; nor any point in literature about which opinions are more divided. This has been the caſe from Ariſtotle to Voltaire; and amongſt ſuch an infinity of critics, few have done any real ſervice to the ſubject of their

enquiries. Let us conſider tragedy under thoſe heads to which Ariſtotle's rules may be reduced; viz. the ſubject, characters, ſentiments, and language. I ſhall begin with the ſubject, or fable.

That celebrated Grecian critic defines tragedy to be an imitation of an action that is grave, entire, and hath a juſt length; the ſtile of which is agreeable and diverſified, and which, without the aſſiſtance of narration, by means of compaſſion and terror perfectly refines in us all ſorts of paſſions.

The moſt important part of tragedy, according to the ſame critic, is the fable, or the compoſition of things: for tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of their actions, lives, good or ill fortune; all which conſiſt in action; and

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the end is not a quality, but an action. Now we have ſuch or ſuch qualities by our manners, but we are happy or miſerable by our actions. Tragedy then does not endeavour to imitate manners, but adds them by reaſon of the actions; ſo that actions and fable are the end of tragedy *.

An action is entire which hath a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning is that which neceſſarily ſuppoſes nothing to be before it, and requires after it ſomething elſe, which is or ought to be. The end is juſt contrary; for it requires nothing after it, but neceſſarily ſuppoſes ſomething which precedes it. The middle is that which ſuppoſes ſomething which ought to precede it, and

* Ariſt. Poet. ch. vi.

requires ſomething which ought to follow. This is Ariſtotle's definition of a complete action, and it agrees with Plato's; the maxim is drawn from nature and the practice of the antients: that critic regarded Oedipus as the fineſt ſubject for tragedy the wit of man ever thought of. Let us take a view of the fable. The ſcene opens with a ſacrifice which a great number of Thebans are making in the court of Oedipus's palace. That prince enters, and to comfort the people, tells them that he had ſent Creon a long time ago to enquire of Apollo's oracle at Delphos, the means of making the devouring peſtilence ceaſe, upon which Creon arrives and relates what the oracle had ſaid; Oedipus ſends for Tireſias to explain it. The prophet at firſt refuſed to do it; but provoked at laſt by the ſevere carriage of Oedipus, he

he accuſes him of the murder of Laius. Oedipus imagines that it was Creon made him do this: Creon complains of this injuſtice, ſo the two princes quarrel. Jocaſta comes in to appeaſe them, and endeavours to remove the uneaſineſs, which the reproach that was caſt on Oedipus gave him; but all that ſhe ſaid ſerved only to augment his trouble. A meſſenger enters from Corinth, who brought the news of the death of king Polybius, who was thought to be his father; and to remove ſome fears which he had upon account of his ſuppoſed deſiling his father's bed, he tells him, that the king and queen of Corinth were not his parents. He was reſolved to know the matter thoroughly, and enquires of the ſhepherd, who alone was able to give him a perfect account of his misfortunes: the ſhepherd leaves him no room

to doubt of all his crimes, and then he punishes himself. This is the entire plan of the Oedipus, even with the epiſodes. There is nothing in it but what may be ſeen at once, and which the memory may eaſily retain *.

This is the principal of the three unities about which critics are of ſo many different opinions. The unity of time is alſo of great importance with ſome critics; but this is not ſo perfectly ſettled

* The happieſt of all ſubjects for tragedy, if ſuch a one could be invented, would be where a man of integrity falls into a great misfortune by doing an innocent action, but which by ſome ſingular means he conceives to be criminal. His remorſe aggravates his diſtreſs; and our compaſſion, unreſtrained by indignation, riſes to its higheſt pitch. Pity becomes thus to be the ruling paſſion of a pathetic tragedy; and by proper repreſentation, may be raiſed to a height ſcarce exceeded by any thing felt in real life.

Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. p. 228.

as that of action. Ariſtotle ſays, that a piece, to have its juſt extent, ought to take up ſo much time, as it muſt neceſſarily, or probably do, rightly to induce all the incidents, till the unravelling the plot ſhews the laſt good or ill fortune of the principal perſons.

As this is one of thoſe paſſages which has ſo often been quoted in defence of the unity of time, I cannot help obſerving, that a poet is left much more at liberty by it than our modern critics will allow. It has often been aſſerted that the time ſhould not exceed the repreſentation; and a faultleſs piece compoſed by the exacteſt rules of criticiſm will be formed on that plan; but a thouſand fertile and poetic ſubjects muſt be rejected, if we were always to ſubmit to this unity *. Many of

* Boſſu, after obſerving with wonderful critical ſagacity, that winter is an improper ſeaſon for

of the greateſt poets, I know, have conformed to it: the actions of the fineſt pieces of Sophocles are but of four hours. Thoſe of Racine's Cinna, Andromache, and Bajazet, the Oedipus either of Corneille, de la Motte, or Voltaire, are not of longer duration. If other plots, ſays Voltaire, require a greater length of time for their execution, it is a licence only pardonable in favour of very great beauties; and the farther this licence is extended, the greater the fault muſt be †. It would ſhew a want of talents

an epic poem, and night not leſs improper for tragedy; admits, however, that an epic poem may be ſpread through the whole ſummer months, and a tragedy through the whole ſun-ſhine hours of the longeſt ſummer-day. Du Poeme Epique, l. iii. chap. 12. At this rate an Engliſh tragedy may be longer than a French tragedy; and in Nova Zembla the time of a tragedy and of an epic poem may be the ſame.

Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. p. 269.

† Pref. to Voltaire's Oedipus.

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and fertility to extend an action beyond the limited time and place. Aſk a man, ſays he, who has hurried together too many events in the ſame play, the reaſon of this conduct? If he is ſincere, he will tell you he wanted genius to fill his piece with a ſingle fact; and if he employs two days, and takes in two towns for the ſcene of action, he aſſured it is becauſe he had not the addreſs to confine it to the ſpace of three hours, and within the limits of a palace, as probability required *.

I muſt however differ from this ingenious Frenchman in his criticiſm. Neglecting the unities is no proof of want of genius, of which there are too many proofs to need citing; twenty Voltaires won't make one Shakeſpear. It is

* Eſſay on Tragedy.

abſurd

abſurd to imagine that the great irregular geniuſes break through rules becauſe they cannot conform to them: no; their rapid invention hurries them beyond all bounds, and inſtead of writing on rules laid down by others, their works occaſion new rules. Breaking the unities may often give riſe to great and manly beauties, as we have many inſtances in Shakeſpear; many of whoſe ſtriking paſſages are the effects of his no critical learning.

"It is obſervable, that the ſame critics, who condemn ſo much in Shakeſpear a neglect of the unities, are equally forward in acknowledging the ſingular energy and beauty of his ſentiments. Now, it ſeems to me, that the fault which they cenſure, is the principal ſource of the beauties which they admire. For,

as the poet was not confined to an unity and ſimplicity of action, he created incidents in proportion to the promptneſs and vivacity of his genius. Hence, his ſentiments ſpring from motives exquiſitely fitted to produce them: to this they owe that original ſpirit, that commanding energy, which overcome the improbabilities of the ſcene; and tranſport the heart in defiance of the underſtanding. I do not mean by this to juſtify our poet in all his exceſſes. It muſt be confeſs'd, that he has often carried the indulgence of his genius much too far: but it is equally certain, that a rigid obſervance of the dramatic unities is not free from objections: for as no one ſimple and confined action can furniſh many incidents, and thoſe, ſuch as they are, muſt tend to one common point, it neceſſarily follows, that there muſt be a

ſameneſs and uniformity in the ſentiments. What muſt be the reſult of this? Why, narration is ſubſtituted in the place of the action; the weakneſs in the manners ſupplied by elaborate deſcriptions; and the quick and lively turns of paſſion are loſt in the detail and pomp of declamation*." This juſt obſervation is no where more apparent than in the French tragedies in general: the delicacy of their nation requires the ſtricteſt adherence to the unities; and it does not require any great ſagacity to obſerve, that in moſt of their pieces we find the defects which Mr. Webb mentions. Racine, notwithſtanding what the French critics aſſert, was a cool tame genius: in none of his pieces are we hurried away by the poetic fire; no haſty ſtrokes of

* Webb's Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry, p. 105.

true

true paſſion, which lay open the very ſoul; in a word, no characters ſo admirably ſuſtained as we every where find in Shakeſpear. Corneille himſelf, or as the French always call him, "The great Corneille," abounds for ever with pomp of declamation: inſtead of ſtrokes of character and paſſion, every thing is deſcribed; the unavoidable neceſſity of regarding the unities †. Rouſſeau has the honeſty

† How hard dialogue-writing is, will be evident even without reaſoning from the imperfect compoſitions of this kind found without number in all languages. The art of mimicking any ſingularity in voice or geſture is a rare talent, though directed by ſight and hearing, the acuteſt and moſt lively of our external ſenſes: how much more rare muſt the talent be of imitating characters and internal emotions, tracing all their different tints, and repreſenting them in a lively manner by natural ſentiments properly expreſſed! The truth is, ſuch execution is too delicate for an ordinary genius; and for that reaſon, the bulk of writers, inſtead of expreſſing a paſſion like one

honeſty to expoſe his countrymen's abſurdity with great ſpirit and humour; the excellency of the obſervations which

one who is under its power, content themſelves with deſcribing it like a ſpectator. To awake paſſion by an internal effort merely, without any external cauſe, requires great ſenſibility; and yet this operation is neceſſary not leſs to the writer than to the actor; becauſe none but they who actually feel a paſſion, can repreſent it to the life. The writer's part is much more complicated; he muſt join compoſition with action; and, in the quickeſt ſucceſſion, be able to adopt every different character introduced in his work. But a very humble flight of imagination may ſerve to convert a writer into a ſpectator, ſo as to figure, in ſome obſcure manner, an action as paſſing in his ſight and hearing. In this figured ſituation, he is led naturally to deſcribe as a ſpectator, and at ſecond-hand to entertain his readers with his own obſervations, with cool deſcription and florid declamation; inſtead of making them eye-witneſſes, as it were, to a real event, and to every movement of genuine paſſion. Thus, in the bulk of plays, a tireſome monotony prevails, a pompous declamatory ſtile, without entering into different characters or paſſions.

Elements of Criticiſm, vol. ii. p. 155.

paint

paint the French taſte exactly will excuſe the length of the quotation.

"There is in general much diſcourſe and but very little action on the French ſtage: the reaſon of which is, perhaps, the French talk much more than they do, or at leaſt that they pay a much greater regard to what is ſaid than to what is done. I remember the anſwer of a ſpectator, who in coming out from the repreſentation of one of the pieces of Dionyſius the Tyrant was aſked, what he had ſeen? *I have ſeen nothing*, ſaid he, *but have heard a deal of talk.* The ſame might be ſaid of the French plays. Racine and Corneille, with all their genius, are no more than talkers; and their ſucceſſor is the firſt of all the French poets, who, in imitation of the Engliſh, has ſometimes ventured to bring ſcenes of action upon the ſtage.

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In common, their plays conſiſt only of witty or florid dialogues well diſpoſed; where it is obvious the chief deſign of the ſpeakers is to diſplay their talents of wit and elocution. In the mean time, almoſt every ſentiment is delivered in the ſtile of a general maxim. However tranſported they may be with paſſion, they always preſerve their reſpect to the publick, of whom they think more conſtantly than of themſelves. The pieces of Racine and Moliere excepted *, egotiſm is excluded as ſcrupulouſly from the French drama, as from the writings of Meſſieurs de Port Royal; and the paſſions

* Moliere ought not to be ranked here with Racine. The firſt indeed abounds with maxims and ſentential obſervations, like all the others, eſpecially in all his verſified pieces: but in Racine all is ſentimental; he makes every character ſpeak for the author, and is in this point truly ſingular among all the dramatic writers of his nation.

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of the human heart never ſpeak, but with all the modeſty of Chriſtian humility, in the third perſon. There is beſides a certain affected dignity in theatrical diſcourſe and action, which never permits the paſſions to be expreſſed in their natural language, or ſuffers the writer to diveſt himſelf of the poet, and attend to the ſcene of action, but binds him conſtantly down to the theatre and the audience. Hence the moſt critical ſituations, the moſt intereſting circumſtances of the piece, never make him forget the niceſt arrangement of phraſe or elegancies of attitude. Should even Deſpair plunge a dagger in the heart of his hero, not contented that like Polixenes he ſhould obſerve a decency in falling, he would not let him fall at all: for the ſake of decency, he is ſupported bolt upright after he is dead; and continues as erect after he has expired as before.

"The reaſon of all this is, that a Frenchman requires on the ſtage neither nature nor deception, but only wit and ſentiments: he requires only to be diverted, and cares not whether what he ſees be a true or falſe repreſentation of nature. Nobody goes here to the theatre for the pleaſure of ſeeing the play, but for the ſake of ſeeing, and being ſeen by, the company, and to catch a ſubject for converſation after the play is over. The actor with them is always the actor, never the character he repreſents. He, who gives himſelf thoſe important airs of an univerſal ſovereign is not the emperor Auguſtus, it is only Baron; the relict of Pompey is no other than Adrienne; Alzira is Mademoiſelle Gauſſin; and that formidable ſavage is no other than the civil Grandval. The comedians, on the other

other hand, give themſelves no trouble to keep up an illuſion which nobody expects. They place the venerable heroes of antiquity between ſix rows of young ſpruce Pariſians. They have their Roman dreſſes made up in the French faſhion; the weeping Cornelia is ſeen bathed in tears, with her rouge laid on two fingers thick: Cato has his hair dreſs'd and powder'd, and Brutus ſtruts along in a Roman hoop-petticoat; yet nobody is ſhocked at all this abſurdity, nor doth it hinder the ſucceſs of the piece; for as the actors only are ſeen in the characters, ſo what reſpects the author is the only thing conſidered in the play; and though propriety ſhould be entirely neglected, it is eaſily excuſed, for every one knows that Corneille was no taylor, nor Crebillion a peruke-maker." Eloiſa, vol. ii. p. 64.

Neither the unities of action, of time, or of place, ought to be regarded ſo much as a fable which admits a variety of incidents; as character, or as paſſion: We may have admirable tragedies without one of the unities; but without character and paſſion we can have no tragedy. Let us but reflect on the multitude of tragedies we have which are wrote ſtrictly to all the unities; yet one irregular piece of Shakeſpear is to be preferred to five hundred of them. The only objection Mr. Maſon* tells us to obſerving the unities is, that a ſtrict adherence to them reſtrains the genius of the poet; and, by the ſimplicity of its conduct, it diminiſhes the pathos of the fable. But ſurely this objection muſt ceaſe, when we conſider how many excellent tragedies, in which our terror and compaſſion are

* Letters prefixed to Elfrida.

raiſed

raiſed to the greateſt degree, have been compoſed on this plan. Can it be ſaid that Sophocles, Corneille, or Racine, would have compoſed better tragedies, had they neglected theſe neceſſary rules?

Yes; undoubtedly; one of the juſt objections to the French tragedies of Corneille and Racine is their pepetual declamation and deſcription, which is frequently occaſioned by the poet's not being at liberty to *repreſent* thoſe incidents which he is forced to make his characters deſcribe. Had theſe poets not been ſo tied down, we ſhould have met with more ſtrokes of genuine character in Corneille, whoſe fire, had not criticiſm damp'd it, would have blazed into action and pathos; and Racine, by admitting a greater variety of incidents into his pieces, would have

placed character and paſſion before our eyes, inſtead of deſcribing the one weakening the other.

A fable that is compoſed on the rules of criticiſm, can admit of little or no variety of action, few incidents, and conſequently few of thoſe ſituations which give riſe to quick and paſſionate dialogue; which introduce naturally thoſe ſudden ſtrokes and turns of paſſion, which can only delineate truth of character. When the action of the tragedy paſſes before our eyes; when a variety of ſtriking incidents ſet the characters of the piece in their full light; when we hear only the language of paſſion varying through all the perſonages; in ſuch a piece our terror and pity will be moved to the greateſt degree: but this cannot be where the unities are obſerved.—Let us conſider

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the original of theſe unities; Brumoy gives us the following account of them.

" The Iliad, ſays he, and good ſenſe, ought by the ſame motive to have determined Eſchylus to chuſe for the ſubject of a tragedy one great action, in itſelf illuſtrious and intereſting. An action perfect and entire, where the parts made a whole. A ſingular action; without a mixture of independent actions. An action which contained one ſingle truth, hid in a circle of events united one to another, and all tending at once to demonſtrate the plot to the underſtanding, in proportion as they ſhowed it to the eyes. It is eaſy to ſee that tragedy is only the epic poem abridged, for the action, the chain of events, the fable (as Ariſtotle calls it) have in Homer that unity, that ſimplicity, that nobleneſs,

that intereſt, that whole, that connection, that innocence, that perfection; in ſhort, all thoſe qualities which the Greeks took care to introduce into their plays.—From the unity of action proceeded the unity of place: Nature only, which Eſchylus in his views of Homer ſtudied, could have made him perceive, that the ſpectators being placed in a pit, or in a circus, it was neceſſary that the action, in order to make it carry the reſemblance of truth, ſhould paſs under their eyes, conſequently in one and the ſame place. Homer being but a narrator, might make the narration take voyages without his heroes, and might change the ſcene without carrying his readers into another country. Nothing had been more eaſy to the tragic poets, and to Eſchylus, who was their model, to follow a hero ſometimes into his cloſet, where he planned his

enterprizes, and ſometimes into the plain where he fought his battles. But would that have been in nature? Certainly not. The ſpectator may help to deceive himſelf upon the duration of an action, be it more or leſs, provided that that action does not go beyond certain bounds, and that the intervals are dextrouſly managed; but he cannot deceive himſelf ſo groſly in the ſcenery part, as to imagine that it paſſes from a palace to a plain, and from one city to another, while he ſees himſelf ſhut up in a bounded ſituation *.

This paſſage I think proves the futility of the arguments which have ſo often been produced in favour of the unities. Eſchylus we will ſuppoſe took the hint

* Theatre des Grecs.

from

from Homer; Sophocles and Euripides followed the example; Ariſtotle and other critics pointed out the practice of theſe Grecians, and from them drew up rules for tragic compoſition. Such then is the authority in queſtion. But can it be thought that all ſucceeding writers are to tread in the ſame paths as the Greeks? Why have we dropped their chorus? None but the moſt bigoted ſticklers to antiquity pretend that the modern invention of acts is a vaſt improvement in tragedy; the chorus was a perpetual cramp on the poet, but our acts allow a much greater latitude. My Lord Kaimes has a very ſenſible obſervation on this ſubject, which I ſhall quote. "By dropping the chorus, ſays he, an opportunity is afforded to ſplit our drama into parts or acts, which in the repreſentation are diſtinguiſhed by intervals of time; and during

during theſe intervals, the ſtage is totally evacuated, and the ſpectacle ſuſpended. This conſtruction qualifies our drama for ſubjects ſpread through a wide ſpace both of time and of place. The time ſuppoſed to paſs during the ſuſpenſion of the repreſentation, is not meaſured by the time of the ſuſpenſion; nor is any connection formed, betwixt the box we ſit in and the place where things are ſuppoſed to be tranſacted in our abſence: and, by that means, many ſubjects can be juſtly repreſented in our theatres, for which there was no place in thoſe of ancient Greece. This doctrine may be illuſtrated, by comparing a modern play to a ſet of hiſtorical pictures: let us ſuppoſe them five in number, and the reſemblance will be complete. Each of the pictures reſembles an act in one of our plays. There muſt neceſſarily be

the

the ſtricteſt unity of place and time in each picture; and the ſame neceſſity requires theſe two unities during each act of a play, becauſe, during an act, there is no interruption in the ſpectacle. Now, when we view in ſucceſſion a number of ſuch hiſtorical pictures, let it be, for example, the hiſtory of Alexander by Le Brun, we have no difficulty to conceive, that months or years have paſſed betwixt the ſubjects exhibited in two different pictures, though the interruption is imperceptible in paſſing our eyes from the one to the other. We have as little difficulty to conceive a change of place, however great. In this matter, there is truly no difference betwixt five acts of a modern play, and five ſuch pictures. Where the repreſentation is ſuſpended, we can with the greateſt facility ſuppoſe any length of time, or any change of

place.

place. The ſpectator, it is true, may be conſcious that the real time and place are not the ſame with what are employ'd in the repreſentation, even including the intervals; but this is a work of reflection. He may alſo be conſcious that Garrick is not king Lear; that the play-houſe is not Dover cliffs; nor the noiſe he hears thunder and lightning. In a word, during an interruption of the repreſentation, it is not more difficult for a ſpectator to imagine himſelf carried from place to place, and from one period of time to another, than at once, when the ſcene firſt opens, to be carried from London to Rome, or from the preſent time to two thouſand years back. And it muſt appear ridiculous, that a critic, who makes no difficulty of ſuppoſing candle-light to be ſun-ſhine, and ſome painted canvaſſes a palace or a priſon,

ſhould affect ſo much difficulty in imagining a latitude of place or of time in the ſtory, beyond what is neceſſary in the repreſentation. * " I conſider this remark as deciſive in reſpect to the unities, and ſets the abſurd exactneſs of the French critics in a juſt light.

My lord Kaimes's obſervation refutes the following remarks of Batteux: " The unity of time ſuppoſes the ſpace of a natural day the ſun makes in, or the revolution of twenty-four hours, by which is meant, that the action is to begin and end in that ſpace, for the reaſon we have given elſewhere. And indeed this rule is not ſo much a rule of rigour as a modification, or a kind of ſoftening of the ſtrict rule. The abſolute rule confines the duration of the action to the time actually taken up in repreſentation, that is, to begin and end

* Elements of Criticiſm, vol. iii. p. 275.

within

within two or three hours at farthest. We taſte the pleaſure ariſing from this degree of perfection in the tragedies of Oedipus, the Horatii, and Athaliah. But as it is very rare to meet with ſubjects that can be confined within ſuch narrow limits; cuſtom has enlarged the rule, and extended the duration of the action to twenty-four hours. Unity of place taken in the rigorous ſenſe of the term, requires that every thing ſhould paſs exactly on the ſame ſpot. The ſame indulgence which enlarged the limits of the time, will not be admitted here. It is not ſo eaſy to deceive the eye, which is always attentively fixed on the repreſentation, as the mind; which in caſes of this kind is, in a manner, wholly abſorbed in imagination and ſentiment. Beſides that, when the actors treſpaſs a little upon the unity of time, they have art enough

not

not to fix too preciſely the inſtant in which the action begins. This innocent artifice is generally agreeable to us, and we even owe them thanks for it, ſince by this means they conceal a defect in the action, which, if diſcovered, would take from our pleaſure. But if the place was changed, and this change made without altering the ſcenery, and by this means a confuſion introduced into the repreſentation, the place, action, and diſcourſes, would no longer have any connection. The actor would ſay, *What a ſuperb temple is this! How delicious is this garden!* and we are ſtill in a cloſet, where the former acts placed us. If the ſcenes are ſhifted, the charms of the illuſion are broken. Is there any appearance of probability, that the place we behold ſhould be changed into a deſart, a foreſt, or a palace? In nature, if

the ſcene changes, it is becauſe we ourſelves change place. But here it is the reverſe. The point of ſight changes its place, and we remain where we were before." Batteux Princip. of Lit. vol. ii. p. 244.

SECT. II.

SHAKESPEAR never obſerved the unities. I have often wondered how Mr. Upton could write ſo much to diſplay that immortal man's imaginary learning, when 'tis much more to his credit not to have had a grain. We freely pardon the blemiſhes and abſurdities that eſcape a rude uncultivated genius, but we expect more order and more decency from one who poſſeſſed as large a ſhare of learning, as that gentleman ſuppoſes Shakeſpear did. Not content with en-

endeavouring to prove this, he ridiculously imagines himself able to display an adherence to the unities in some of his plays. He says "There are many, who never having read one word of Aristotle, gravely cite his rules, and talk of the unities of time and place, at the very mentioning Shakespear's name; they don't seem ever to have given themselves the trouble of considering, whether or no his story does not hang together, and the incidents follow each other naturally and in order; in short, whether or no he has not a beginning, middle and end. If you will not allow that he wrote strictly tragedies; yet it may be granted that he wrote dramatic heroic poems; in which is there not an imitation of one action, serious, entire, and of a just length, and which, without the help of narration, raises pity and terror in the beholder's breast,

breaſt, and refines the perturbed paſſions *?"

A few ſlight remarks will diſplay the falſity of this aſſertion. I ſay nothing of time and place, as it is very well known Shakeſpear never regarded them; but are the tragedies of Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet, (which he particularly cites as examples) *Imitations of ſingle actions?* The unity of action cannot be obſerved, if the epiſodes in the play are not ſo cloſely connected with the action, as to be abſolutely neceſſary towards bringing on the cataſtrophe. Let me aſk Mr. Upton, whether the death of Banquo in Macbeth is not a diſtinct and ſeparate action? It may be extracted from the fable, which will remain juſt as complete without, as with it. It divides the attention of the audience, and

* Critical Obſervations on Shakeſpear, p. 42.

calls off our pity and terror from the heroes of the piece: The death of lady Macduff is of the ſame nature, both being actions of two diſtinct tragedies; and which do not aſſiſt the *denouement* of Macbeth. I could name other extremely vicious epiſodes in this play, but the two I have mentioned quite deſtroy the unity of action: The whole plan of the tragedy is wrong; for the death of Duncan is one, and too conſiderable a one to be made only an inferior one to bring about the grand event of the plot.

The fable of Othello is much more regular than was cuſtomary with Shakeſpear. The epiſodes are fewer, and the incidents much better connected; yet in this tragedy there are many ſuperfluous ſcenes, which might be retrenched without the fable's ſuffering: the firſt ſcene, and

and ſeveral others, preſent ſome pictures of tragi-comedy, the moſt barbarous of all compoſitions. As to Hamlet, it is the moſt irregular of the three. I have often endeavoured to diſcover a unity of action in it, by conſidering the jumble of epiſodes as ſo many links of one chain; but it is impoſſible: it would be an attempt as abſurd as Mr. Upton's, to think of diſtinguiſhing between the real fable and the epiſodes in this tragedy; for they are ſo complicated, ſo mixed and confounded together, that it is impoſſible to ſeparate the one totally from the other; yet we may plainly ſee the want of a unity of action in the variety of actions which it contains, and the uſeleſs vicious ſcenes, not to ſay whole characters, that are jumbled together. The ſcene which begins the ſecond act between Polonius and Reynoldo, is entirely ſuperfluous: the whole part of

Fortinbras might have been dispensed with, as he seems to be introduced only to weaken the catastrophe. After the death of Hamlet, all is vicious, and tends to draw the attention of the audience from the impressions which the catastrophe must necessarily have occasioned. The fifth act opens with the grave-digging scene, of which I shall say nothing: in short, this piece is a dramatic history of several actions, both comic and tragic.

In none of the three are the unities of time and place ever regarded for a moment. I do not here renew the defence of neglecting them; indeed I cannot but remark, that they may be broke through with too little ceremony, as we must allow to be the case in Hamlet; but I have pointed out the defects in the fables of these tragedies, by examining them on the

the rules of criticiſm. I do not myſelf blame our immortal bard (though he is certainly too free in ſome of his wild excurſions) for introducing that variety of incidents which give riſe to paſſion and character; but as Mr. Upton defended theſe tragedies by Ariſtotle's rules, it was neceſſary to point out their *critical* defects.

Theſe very tragedies of which I am now ſpeaking, conſidered in a different light, but eſpecially Macbeth and Othello, are certainly maſter-pieces of genius; but if we confine ourſelves to the definition which Ariſtotle, and ſucceeding critics, have given to the word Tragedy, neither theſe, nor many others of Shakeſpear's can be allowed to claim that title. But let us take a nearer view of ſome of this great man's celebrated compoſitions.

If we overlook the tranſgreſſions againſt the unity of action, the fable of Macbeth is finely calculated, as Shakeſpear has drawn the events of ſeventeen years together, to form a noble and ſtriking tragedy: this muſt be apparent to every one. The action is truly great, important, and tragical; and a ſuſpenſive terror muſt hang continually on the minds of an audience, during its repreſentation. The hiſtory the fable is taken from, is well known; but I cannot help taking ſome notice of the machinery, on which the plot is in a great meaſure founded. Mr. Johnſon juſtly obſerves *, "That in order to make a true eſtimate of the abilities and merit of a writer, it is always neceſſary to examine the genius of his age, and the opinions of his contemporaries. A poet who ſhould now make

* Miſcel. Obſerv. on Macbeth, p. 1, 2, 3.

the

the whole action of his tragedy depend upon enchantment, and produce the chief events by the aſſiſtance of ſupernatural agents, would be cenſured as tranſgreſſing the bounds of probability; he would be baniſhed from the theatre to the nurſery, and condemned to write fairy tales inſtead of tragedies. But a ſurvey of the notions that prevailed at the time when this play was written, will prove that Shakeſpear was in no danger of ſuch cenſures, ſince he only turned the ſyſtem that was then univerſally admitted, to his advantage, and was far from overburthening the credulity of his audience. The reality of witchcraft or enchantment, which, though not ſtrictly the ſame, are confounded in this play, has in all ages and countries been credited by the common people, and in moſt by the learned themſelves. The phantoms

have appeared more frequently in proportion as the darkneſs of ignorance has been more groſs; but it cannot be ſhewn that the brighteſt gleams of knowledge have at any time been ſufficient to drive them out of the world. In the reign of king James, in which this tragedy was written, many circumſtances concurred to propagate and confirm this opinion. The king, who was much celebrated for his knowledge, had, before his arrival in England, not only examined in perſon a woman accuſed of witchcraft, but had given a very formal account of the practices and illuſions of evil ſpirits, &c. in his Dialogues of Dæmonologie. Thus the doctrine of witchcraft was very powerfully inculcated; and as the greateſt part of mankind have no other reaſons for their opinions than that they are in faſhion, it cannot be doubted but this perſuaſion made

made a rapid progreſs, ſince vanity and credulity co-operated in its favour, and it had a tendency to free cowardice from reproach. Upon this general infatuation Shakeſpear might be eaſily allowed to found a play, eſpecially as he has followed, with great exactneſs, ſuch hiſtories as were then thought true; nor can it be doubted that the ſcenes of enchantment, however they may now be ridiculed, were both by himſelf and his audience thought awful and affecting." The curiouſneſs of theſe obſervations will, I hope, pardon the length of the quotation, eſpecially as it tends to anſwer an objection which has oftentimes been made to this admirable tragedy.

Othello is another of theſe celebrated plays, the fable of which is more regular than even that of Macbeth, which by ſome

ſome is reckoned the maſter-piece of Shakeſpear. The fable is taken from a novel of Giraldi Cinthio, with ſome few alterations, which are made generally for the better. The Italian Cinthio, who compoſed a large volume of novels, had a moſt luxuriant and poetic imagination, a fruitful invention, and there is a delicacy of compoſition in his romances that renders them very pleaſing and entertaining. Shakeſpear borrowed the fables of ſeveral of his plays from this original. The jealouſy of Othello, which is the paſſion predominant in this piece, is worked up by the poet to ſuch a height as to form a ſubject truly tragic in its conſequences.

In ſpite of all the great and glaring faults which we ſee in Hamlet, that tragedy, if altered by a man of genius, the

ſuperfluous ſcenes left out, and the piece in general rendered more regular, might be made much ſuperior to what it is at preſent. I know it will be objected to this, that it is needleſs to alter a tragedy, which at preſent is one of the fineſt on our theatre: but the ſucceſs which Hamlet meets with now, is owing to thoſe beauties which might be preſerved when altered: I would only propoſe to curtail its abſurdities. The ground plot is truly tragic, and there are a multitude of ſtrokes in it which are infinitely great. "The Electra of Sophocles, in many reſpects, is not very unlike the Hamlet of Shakeſpear. Ægyſthus and Clytemneſtra, having murdered the former king, were in poſſeſſion of the crown, when Oreſtes returned from Phocis, where he had been privately ſent by his ſiſter Electra. Theſe two contrive,

trive, and ſoon after effect, the punishment of the murderers. Electra is a Grecian woman, of a maſculine and generous diſpoſition of mind; ſhe had been a witneſs of the wickedneſs of thoſe two miſcreants, who had barbarouſly plotted the death of her father, the renowned Agamemnon: his ghoſt called for juſtice, and ſhe herſelf, rather than they ſhall eſcape, will be the inſtrument of vengeance. Thus when Clytemneſtra calls out to Oreſtes,

Oh! ſon, oh! ſon, have mercy on thy mother.
[*from within.*

Electra replies,

For thee ſhe felt no mercy, or thy father.
Clyt. Oh! I'm wounded. [*from within.*
Elect. Double the blow, Oreſtes.

Soon after Oreſtes kills Ægyſthus; and, that this piece of juſtice may be a greater expiation to the manes of the murdered

murdered king, he kills him in the ſame place where Ægyſthus had killed Agamemnon *."

Before I leave the ſubject of this tragedy, I cannot help taking notice of Monſ. de Voltaire's criticiſm on it. His words are; "Indeed I am far from pretending to juſtify the tragedy of Hamlet in every reſpect; it is a groſs and barbarous compoſition, which would not be ſupported by the loweſt populace in France or Italy. Hamlet runs mad in the ſecond act, and Ophelia in the third; he takes the father of his miſtreſs for a rat, runs him through the body; and in deſpair the heroine drowns herſelf. Her grave is dug upon the ſtage; the grave-diggers enter into a converſation ſuitable to ſuch low wretches, and play,

* Upton on Shakeſp. p. 63.

as it were with ſkulls and dead men's bones. Hamlet anſwers their abominable ſtuff with follies equally diſguſting: while this is going on, one of the actors makes the conqueſt of Poland; Hamlet with his mother and father-in-law drink together upon the ſtage; they ſing at table; afterwards they quarrel; and battle and death enſue: in ſhort, one would take this performance for the fruit of the imagination of a drunken ſavage *."

Such is the criticiſm of Voltaire †; and I think it is, without diſpute, one of the

* Diſſert. on ancient and modern Tragedy.

† I am perſuaded that this celebrated Frenchman did not always underſtand the authors he pretended to criticiſe. Several Italian writers have diſcovered how ſuperficial many of his cenſures are, which he has paſſed on ſome of their poets. This is a general fault among the French, who tranſlate our poems into their language, which

the most imprudent pieces of falſhood that ever eſcaped the pen of a man of ſenſe and

which will admit of few or none of thoſe ſtriking beauties which we admire ſo much (and it is the ſame with the Italian) and then a tribe of French writers criticiſe on them, judging merely by the tranſlations. We may form a true notion of the opinion the French in general have of the Engliſh poetry, from the following tranſlation of the firſt ſtanza of Pope's Ode to Cecilia, by M. Lacombe. " Deſcendez du haut des cieux, deſcendez, chaſtes Muſes, pour célébrer ce grand jour. Réveillez par vos divins concerts nos inſtrumens aſſoupis. Faites réſonner ma tremblante lyre, elle imitera ſans ceſſe le ſon amoureux & touchant de la voix. Que le luth ſoupire & rende des accens plaintifs, que la voûte de ce temple tréſſaille aux ſons eclatans de la trompette, & que les echos attentifs & fidéles les répétent mille fois le jour. Tantôt l'orgue profonde & majeſtueuſe accorde lentement ſes tons graves & nombreux; tantôt ſes accords doux, vifs, & brillans flattent légérement l'oreille: mais lorſqu'ils s'animent, qu'ils ſe fortifient & s'élévent, ils ébranlent la terre & les cieux. Une muſique vive & hardie fait éclater la joie. Des airs doux & languiſſans flottent mollement ſur la

and taſte. As he certainly underſtands Engliſh, having reſided here ſome years, and compoſed in the language, his motive cannot be ſuppoſed, ignorance; but perhaps he intended to give the French a very mean opinion of our immortal poet, that they might not ſuſpect his own imitations of him. In fact Voltaire has been more indebted to Shakeſpear than to any other poet whatſoever*. How can it be ſaid that Hamlet runs mad in the ſecond act? The critic himſelf muſt have known that his madneſs was feigned: and it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that Voltaire thought that he took Polonius for a

ſurface polie de l'air, puis s'abbaiſſent, s'affoibliſſent par degrés, & ſe perdent confuſément dans le lointain." How ridiculous we ſhould regard a French criticiſm on this tranſlation! and yet there are many writers in France who judge only from ſuch, but without owning it.

* Particularly in Mahomet and Semiramis. See Gray's Inn Journal, vol. i. No. 41.

rat;

rat; the meaning is ſo plain that he could not miſtake it. Although there is no defending, on the whole, the grave-digging ſcene, yet it is an abſolute falſhood to ſay that Hamlet anſwers their ſtuff with diſguſting follies. Nothing farther from the truth. The prince's reflections breathe a fine ſpirit of morality, and are ſuitable to the condition in which the poet ſuppoſed him. As to the criticiſm on the cataſtrophe, it is likewiſe falſe, or at leaſt thrown into a falſe light. How many excellent modern tragedies are concluded by drinking and brawling, if a bowl of poiſon and a rapier are to be called by thoſe titles? I fear moſt of thoſe of Sophocles muſt alſo be damned immediately, according to Voltaire's opinion. But where is the ſinging at table, that diſguſts our critic ſo much? There is no ſuch thing in the original. In ſhort,

the whole criticiſm is falſe, flagrant, and a moſt illiberal attack on one of the greateſt poets that ever exiſted, and to whom the Frenchman is infinitely indebted *.

SECT. III.

IN theſe three tragedies, which I have mentioned above, the ſubject is formed without having recourſe to a love-plot.

* Prejudiced as the French nation in general are, in favour of their own literature, ſome impartial men amongſt them allow the ſuperiority of our poetry. " La poëſie Françoiſe reſemble, ſelon moi, à une belle femme, qui plait par la régularité de ſes traits, & par quelques autres beautés particulieres; mais dont les yeux & le teint n'ont ni cette vivacité brillante, ni cette riante fraîcheur, dont l'impreſſion ſubite & violente enchante, ravit, & enléve l'ame. La poëſie Angloiſe me paroît reſembler à une beauté fort irréguliere, mais que mille appas, qui naiſſent de ſon irrégularité même, font adorer; qui joint une noble fierté à une douceur amiable; qui réunit tous les agrémens de la jeuneſſe; & qui poſſéde, en un mot, tout ce qu'il faut pour charmer."

I can-

I cannot call Othello's love for Deſdemona, nor that of Hamlet for Ophelia by that name: Jealouſy is the reigning paſſion in Othello; and Hamlet's love forms ſo trifling a part of the piece, that it cannot be regarded in that light. It has been long a diſpute, whether this paſſion is a proper ſubject for tragedies; and it has accordingly been conſidered in a variety of lights: but the abbé du Bos gives the moſt ſatisfactory opinion about it. "Men, ſays he, whom we regard as worthy of our eſteem, have a power of intereſting us in their various agitations and misfortunes; but we are more particularly affected with the inquietudes and afflictions of ſuch, as reſemble us in their paſſions. Thoſe diſcourſes that remind us of ourſelves, and entertain us with our own ſentiments, have a particular attraction to engage us. It is, therefore,

) are not ſuſceptible of the
as ourſelves, do not reſemble
is thoſe that are, the latter
to us by a particular con-
inſtance; Achilles, impa-
out for the ſiege of Troy,
ody's attention; but ſtill his

us les diſcours qui nous ramenent
& qui nous entretiennent de nos
ns, ont pour nous un attrait par-
it donc naturel d'avoir de la prédi-
s imitations qui dépeignent d'autres
c'eſt à-dire, des perſonnages livrés
que nous reſſentons actuellement,
ons reſſenties autrefois. L'homme
it une chimere; mais l'homme en
les paſſions, n'eſt pas un être moins
Le même temperament qui nous
s unes, nous éloigne des autres.
ue certaines paſſions qui ayent pour
et dont j'ai parlé ci-deſſus. Il n'y
s paſſions qui ayent un raport par-
ous, & dont la peinture ait des droits
notre attention.
ions critiques ſur la Poëſie & ſur la
ture, Utrecht Edit. Tome i. § 17.

natural for us to be prejudiced in favour of imitations, wherein we diſcern ourſelves repreſented in others; that is, wherein we behold perſonages abandoned to ſuch paſſions, as we either at preſent feel, or have formerly been ſwayed by. Man without paſſions, is a chimera; but man a prey to all paſſions, is a being equally chimerical. The ſame conſtitution of body that gives us up a prey to ſome, ſecures us from others. Wherefore there are only ſome particular paſſions which bear a particular relation to us, the deſcription whereof has the privilege and right of commanding our attention *."

Thoſe

* Tous les hommes que nous trouvons dignes de notre eſtime nous intereſſent a leurs agitations comme à leurs malheurs; mais nous ſommes ſenſibles principalement aux inquiétudes comme aux afflictions de ceux qui nous reſemblent par leur carac-

Thoſe who are not ſuſceptible of the ſame paſſions as ourſelves, do not reſemble us ſo much as thoſe that are, the latter being related to us by a particular connexion. For inſtance; Achilles, impatient to ſet out for the ſiege of Troy, draws every body's attention; but ſtill his

caractere. Tous les diſcours qui nous ramenent à nous mêmes, & qui nous entretiennent de nos propres ſentimens, ont pour nous un attrait particulier. Il eſt donc naturel d'avoir de la prédilection pour les imitations qui dépeignent d'autres nous-mêmes, c'eſt à-dire, des perſonnages livrés à des paſſions que nous reſſentons actuellement, ou que nous avons reſſenties autrefois. L'homme ſans paſſion, eſt une chimere; mais l'homme en proye à toutes les paſſions, n'eſt pas un être moins chimerique. Le même temperament qui nous pouſſe vers les unes, nous éloigne des autres. Ainſi il n'eſt que certaines paſſions qui ayent pour nous cet interêt dont j'ai parlé ci-deſſus. Il n'y a que certaines paſſions qui ayent un raport particulier avec nous, & dont la peinture ait des droits privilégiés ſur notre attention.

Réflexions critiques ſur la Poëſie & ſur la Peinture, Utrecht Edit. Tome i. §. 17.

fate is much more intereſting with reſpect to a young fellow, that pants with thirſt of military glory, than to a man whoſe ambition is to attain to the command of himſelf, in order to become more deſerving of empire over others. The latter will be more engaged with the character which Corneille gives the emperor Auguſtus in his tragedy of Cinna, a character which will have but a very feeble effect upon the admirer of Achilles. The picture of a paſſion which we have never felt, or of a ſituation wherein we have never been, can never move us in ſo lively a manner, as the deſcription of ſuch paſſions and ſituations as either are, or have been formerly, our own caſe. In the firſt place, the mind is but ſlightly touched with the picture of a paſſion, whoſe ſymptoms it is a ſtranger to; it is afraid even of being the dupe

of

of an unfaithful imitation: Now the mind has but an imperfect knowlege of paſſions which the heart never felt; all the information we can receive from others, being inſufficient to give us a juſt and preciſe idea of the agitations of a heart over which they tyrannize. Secondly, our heart muſt have very little inclination to ſuch paſſions as we have been inſenſible of, at twenty-five years of age. The heart attains to its full ſtrength much earlier than the mind; and it is almoſt impoſſible, methinks, for a man of that age not to have felt the motions of all thoſe paſſions, which he is fated to by his conſtitution.

It is very common to form a judgment of the natural motions of the heart in general, by what we feel ourſelves. Thoſe who have no propenſity to a particular paſſion,

paſſion, are apt to imagine that the tranſ-ports with which a poet fills his ſcenes, and which he diſplays as a natural conſe-quence of a paſſion that has never made any impreſſions on them, are not ex-poſed according to truth. Either the conſequences of ſuch a paſſion appear to them as mere ſallies of the irregular fancy of an extravagant poet; or elſe the perſon-ages of the piece ceaſe to have the power of intereſting them. They regard them no longer as men diſturbed with paſſion, but as perſons fallen into a ſtate of real phrenzy and madneſs. According to their way of thinking, theſe people are leſs proper to form a character for the imitation of the ſtage, than to be con-fined to ſome of thoſe houſes, wherein polite nations ſhut up ſuch as are diſor-dered in their intellects. Poets therefore cannot be blamed for chuſing for the

ſubject

ſubject of their imitations the effects of thoſe paſſions, of which men are moſt ſuſceptible. Now of all paſſions, love is the moſt general; there being ſcarce any body but what has had the misfortune of feeling the effects of it, in ſome parts of his life. This is ſufficient to engage a perſon to ſympathize with ſuch as groan under its tyrannical ſway *. Surely, therefore, our poets cannot be blamed for founding ſo many of their tragedies on a love-plot. But though this paſſion, when made the foundation of the ſubject, is ſo extremely proper, yet when introduced in a ſecondary epiſodical manner, it is generally vicious. Thus the loves

* De toutes les paſſions celle de l'amour eſt la plus generale: il n'eſt preſque perſonne qui n'ait eu le malheur de la ſentir du moins une fois en ſa vie. C'en eſt aſſez pour s'intereſſer avec affection aux peines de ceux qu'elle tyranniſe.

Reflexions Critiques, tome i. § 17.

of

of Juba and Marcia, and of Portius and Lucia, in Addiſon's Cato, are vicious and inſipid epiſodes, debaſe the dignity, and deſtroy the unity of the fable *. Mr. Maſon alſo juſtly obſerves, that love is a very improper ſubject, when not the principal one of tragedy †. Voltaire ſays, love muſt either reign with ſovereign ſway, or be totally left out: it cannot be made uſe of as a ſecondary paſſion ‡. And d'Alembert remarks, " Ce ſentiment excluſif & impérieux, ſi propre à nous conſoler de tout, ou à nous rendre tout inſupportable, à nous faire jouir de notre exiſtence, ou à nous la faire déteſter, veut être ſur la théatre comme dans nos cœurs, y régner ſeul & ſans partage. Par-tout ou il ne joue pas le premier rôle, il eſt dégradé par le ſecond ‖."

* Eſſay on Pope, p. 262.
† Preface to Elfrida, p. iii.
‡ Letter to the Ducheſs of Maine.
‖ Lettre à J. J. Rouſſeau, p. 31.

The

The poet I laſt mentioned ſays, "One thing is certain, that in this defect (if it may be called ſo) the French have ſucceeded better than all other nations, ancient or modern. Love appears on our ſtage with a decency, a truth, a delicacy, that is not to be found elſewhere; the reaſon of it is, the French nation has made greater progreſs than any other in the knowlege of ſociety *." Surely this aſſertion muſt be the effect of prejudice, as it is contrary to the truth. In the Cinna of Corneille, which the prince of Condé called "the breviary of kings," Maximus whines like a ſhepherd in Paſtor Fido, amidſt profound political reflections, that excel thoſe of Tacitus and Machiavel; and while the moſt important event, that could happen to the empire of the

* Letter prefixed to the tragedy of Zara.

world

world was debating *, Crebillon has introduced a frigid love-intrigue in his Oreſtes; and Achilles is drawn in love in the Iphigenia of Racine: nor can the rough Mithridates eſcape this paſſion. Alexander is alſo transformed by Racine into a languiſhing lover.

"We have, ſays Monſ. de St. Evremond, an affected tenderneſs where we ought to place the nobleſt ſentiments. We beſtow a ſoftneſs on what ought to be moſt moving; and ſometimes, when we mean plainly to expreſs the graces of nature, we fall into a vicious and mean ſimplicity. We may imagine we make kings and emperors perfect lovers, but in truth we make ridiculous princes of them; and by the complaints and ſighs which we beſtow upon them, where they

* Eſſay on Pope, p. 263.

ought

ought neither to complain nor ſigh, we repreſent them weak, both as lovers and princes. Our great heroes on the theatre generally make love like ſhepherds; and thus the innocence of a ſort of rural paſſion ſupplies with them the place of glory and valour. Sometimes we muſt have a plain, unartificial; ſometimes a tender, and ſometimes a melancholy, whining love; without regarding where that ſimplicity, tenderneſs, or grief is neceſſary. And the reaſon of it is plain; for as we muſt needs have love every where, we look for diverſity in the manners, and ſeldom or never place it in the paſſions *."

The

* Oeuvres de Monſ. de St. Evremond, tom. ii. La plupart des perſonnages de Racine même ont, à mes yeux, moins de paſſion que de métaphyſique, moins de chaleur que de galanterie. Qu'eſt ce que l'amour dans Mithridate, dans Iphigénie, dans Britannicus, dans Bajazet même, & dans Andromaque, ſi on en excepte quelques traits

The abbé du Bos, ſpeaking of Mr. Addiſon's criticiſm on the French poets for ſtuffing their pieces with too much love, ſays, " This writer pretends that the itch of throwing love into all the intrigues of our tragedies, and into almoſt all the characters of the perſonages, has led our poets into ſeveral miſtakes. One

traits des rôles de Roxane & d'Hermione? Phedre eſt peut-être le ſeul ouvrage de ce grand-homme, où l'amour ſoit vraiment terrible & tragique; encore y eſt-il défiguré par l'intrigue obſcure d'Hippolite & l'Aricie. Arnaud l'avoit bien ſenti, quand il diſoit à Racine: *Pourquoi cet Hippolite amoureux?* Le reproche étoit moins d'un caſuiſte que d'un homme de goût. On ſait la réponſe que Racine lui fit: *Eh, monſieur, ſans cela qu'auroient dit les petits maîtres?* Ainſi c'eſt à la frivolité de la nation que Racine a ſacrifié la perfection de ſa piece. L'amour dans Corneille eſt encore plus languiſſant & plus déplacé: ſon génie ſemble s'être épuiſé dans le Cid à peindre cette paſſion, & il n'y a preſqu' aucune de ces autres tragédies que l'amour ne dépare & ne refroidiſſe.

D'Alembert Lettre à Monſ. Rouſſeau, p. 428. Melanges.

of

of the leaſt conſiderable conſiſts in drawing frequently a falſe picture of love. Love is far from being a gay paſſion. True love, the only one that is deſerving to make its appearance on the tragic ſtage, is almoſt always chagrin, melancholy, and ill-humoured." And goes on ſoon after himſelf, "Thus they have given the honour of the buſkin to a mechanic inclination, which is far from having any thing tragical in its nature, or of being capable of balancing the other paſſions. Some even have not bluſhed to give the name of real love to a paſſion which receives its origin only during the repreſentation of the piece; though it be contrary to all probability, that an infant emotion ſhould grow up in one day to the very height and extremity of paſſion. When love is to act a character of importance, it ought at

leaſt to be of ſome ſtanding, it ought to have had leiſure to take root in the heart, and even to have been fed with ſome hopes of ſucceſs. This is what renders the wooers of our French tragedies ſo unlike the characters of men that are really in love *."

We ſee here that this ingenious writer is of a different opinion from Monſ. de Voltaire; his authority, and the inſtances I quoted above will ſurely convince us, that the French are far from deſerving the praiſe beſtowed on them in the paſſage in queſtion. Yet I muſt allow, that Voltaire himſelf has compoſed his Merope and Oreſtes, without having recourſe to an inſipid tenderneſs, or an ill placed and romantic gallantry.

In Mr. Hill's Zara we ſee, in the ſtrongeſt manner, the advantage of found-

* Reflexions Critiques.

ing

ing a piece totally on love, and not letting it appear as the ſecondary paſſion, or as an epiſode. Every incident of the fable is grounded on love, which is very juſtly painted throughout the piece. The cataſtrophe of that noble fable is infinitely affecting: there is hardly a more pathetic ſtroke in tragedy than Oſmyn's killing the innocent Zara, whom he doated on to diſtraction, and then diſcovering his miſtake: not only the terror, but the pity of the audience is raiſed to the higheſt pitch: it is impoſſible not to be overwhelmed with compaſſion at the miſerable fate of Zara, ſtabbed by the man ſhe adored. It would have been drawing Oſmyn out of character, had the poet made him ſurvive the fate of Zara; but the pathetic, in my humble opinion, would have been raiſed by it: the reflection of his living, and being a prey

to horror, miſery and deſpair, would have raiſed a much more melancholy idea than his death, which, in his ſituation, was a comfort. But as it is, the cataſtrophe of this excellent fable is pathetic to the higheſt degree.

Shakeſpear founded ſeveral tragedies on love-plots; one of them perhaps is the moſt affecting ſubject that the wit of man ever thought of. Romeo and Juliet is one of the beſt and moſt regular tragedies this poet ever wrote, and, in my opinion, by far the moſt affecting. The fable of it is very well known; as to the unities, we are not to expect them: there are ſome ſtriking defects in the plot, that muſt appear to every body. The character of Paris is quite unneceſſary in the drama*, and why muſt our compaſſion

* Shakeſpear illuſtrated, vol. i. p. 100.

for

for the unfortunate Romeo be ſuſpended by the undeſerved fate of Paris? What neceſſity is there for making Romeo, who is all along repreſented as an amiable and virtuous character, imbrue his hands in the blood of an innocent youth (whoſe death is of no conſequence) juſt before he expires? But the principal defect in this tragedy, is in the cataſtrophe. Shakeſpear makes Romeo die before Juliet awakes. But in this, and ſome other circumſtances, Mrs. Lenox has ſhewed he copied a tranſlation from the original novel of Bandello, whereon the poet built the fable of his tragedy. Bandello himſelf makes Juliet awake before her huſband dies; in which he has been judiciouſly followed by Mr. Garrick, in his alteration of Shakeſpear's piece. The cataſtrophe was at firſt brought about thus: In the beginning of the fifth act, Romeo

is introduced in Mantua, in expectation of news from Verona, ſaying,

If I may truſt the flatt'ring truth of ſleep,
My dreams preſage ſome joyful news at hand;
My boſom's lord ſits lightly on his throne,
And all this day an unaccuſtom'd ſpirit
Lifts me above the ground with chearful thoughts.

Balthaſar then comes in, and informs him that Juliet is no more. Romeo's anſwer is great and pathetic:

Is it even ſo?—Then I defy the ſtars.

In the original of Bandello, when he is told of this event, aſtoniſhment and grief for ſome moments deprive him of ſpeech; recovering a little, he breaks into complaints and ſelf-reproaches; then, wild with deſpair, he flies to his ſword, and endeavours to kill himſelf, but being prevented by his ſervant, he ſinks into an exceſs of ſilent ſorrow, and, while he weeps,

weeps, calmly deliberates on the means he ſhould uſe to die in the monument with Juliet: This is a ſtriking propriety. But the tranſlator of this novel into Engliſh, makes Romeo immediately reſolve to poiſon himſelf; and Shakeſpear has copied him: I wonder Mr. Garrick did not alter this circumſtance.—But to proceed:

Romeo orders his ſervant to get him ink and paper, and hire poſt-horſes; as ſoon as Balthaſar is gone, he recollects the apothecary, buys poiſon of him, and proceeds with it to Juliet's monument; at the door of which he tells Balthaſar,

Why I deſcend into this bed of death,
Is partly to behold my lady's face:
But chiefly to take thence, from her dead finger,
A precious ring, a ring that I muſt uſe
In dear employment.

Almoſt in the next breath, he ſays,

The time and my intents are ſavage, wild,
More fierce, and more inexorable far,
Than empty tygers, or the roaring ſea.

In this ſpeech, therefore, there is a manifeſt contradiction: For why ſhould Romeo diſſemble with his ſervant at firſt, and then give him ſuch a frightful account of his intention? Having broke open the monument, and ſlain Paris, he takes a view of his wife, and makes a moſt pathetic ſpeech to her body, concluding with,

Eyes, look your laſt!
Arms, take your laſt embrace! and lips, Oh you
The doors of breath, ſeal with a righteous kiſs
A dateleſs bargain to engroſſing death!
Come, bitter conduct! come, unſav'ry guide!
Thou deſp'rate pilot, now at once run on
The daſhing rocks my ſea-ſick, weary bark:
Here's to my love! Oh, true apothecary!
[*Drinks the poiſon.*
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiſs I die. [*Dies.*

When

When the friar comes, Juliet awakes, and being told of her huſband, ſhe ſeizes the cup; but finding no poiſon in it, ſtabs herſelf. This is the cataſtrophe of Shakeſpear's tragedy; and it is altered by Mr. Garrick in the following manner.

As ſoon as he has drank the poiſon, and ſpoke that line,

The doors of death ſeal with a righteous kiſs,

Juliet awakes; and he adds,

Soft — ſhe breathes and ſtirs!

and ſhe ſpeaking, he forgets he is poiſoned, and flies into a rapture of joy:

She ſpeaks, ſhe lives: and we ſhall ſtill be bleſs'd;
My kind propitious ſtars o'erpay me now
For all my ſorrows paſt ——

And ſoon after,

'Tis thy huſband,
'Tis thy Romeo, Juliet, rais'd from deſpair
To joys unutterable! quit, quit, this place
And let us fly together ——

She, not quite awake, does not know him; upon which he goes on,

I am that Romeo,
Nor all th'oppoſing pow'rs of earth or man,
Shall break our bonds, or tear thee from my heart.

She then knowing him, goes to embrace him; Romeo, juſt at that inſtant, recollects that he is poiſoned, and turns from his wife: This gives riſe to one of the fineſt ſcenes of diſtreſs that ever was imagined: He talks of poiſon; ſhe catches the word; and, trembling, aſks his meaning. He anſwers,

It is, indeed — I ſtruggle with him now —
The tranſports that I felt to hear thee ſpeak,
And ſee thy op'ning eyes, ſtopp'd for a moment
His impetuous courſe, and all my mind
Was happineſs and thee; but now the poiſon
Ruſhes thro' my veins — I've not time to tell —
Fate brought me to this place — to take a laſt,
Laſt farewel of my love, and with thee die.

At laſt his raving, and dying with the words

Oh!

Oh! Juliet! Juliet!

is affecting to the higheſt degree; the whole ſcene is worked up with great judgment; and perhaps no tragedy that ever was wrote, can afford a thought ſo truly pathetic as Romeo's forgetting that he is poiſoned. Shakeſpear's catastrophe is very affecting, but nothing in his plot could give riſe to any diſtreſs like this. This play, which, as he wrote it, is more affecting than any of his others*, plainly ſhews

* I know not any other piece of Shakeſpear's that is ſo truly affecting as this. Macbeth will never bring tears into the eyes of an audience; for who can regret or pity the fate of ſuch wretches as the chief perſonages of that play are? In Othello, Deſdemona is certainly an object of pity; but her character is not drawn forth in thoſe colours which attract the chief attention of the ſpectator; Othello and Iago are every thing in this play: Neither of them are to be pitied; for though Othello has a fine character given him, yet ſo vile an action as the murder of his wife, blots out every emotion of pity from the reader's breaſt:

ſhews, that no ſubject is ſo proper for tragedy as love, when it is treated as the predominant paſſion. Boileau ſays very juſtly,

Bien-tôt l'amour fertile en tendres ſentimens
S'empara du theatre, ainſi que des Romans.

breaſt: it is impoſſible a man who is worthy of our pity, could be guilty of ſuch a ſhocking crime. Hamlet's death is rather to be wiſhed for than pitied, dying after revenging the death of his father. The true pathetic, which overwhelms us with pity, is ſeldom raiſed ſingly by death. Mercutio's death touches the audience but little; but when the *principal character*, in whoſe fortune we are moſt intereſted, dies in ſo unhappy a manner, on the very verge of bliſs, like Romeo, our hearts are infinitely affected. Our emotions on reading Lear, as Shakeſpear wrote it, are divided, nor can I think them ſo touching as Romeo's; we are glad at the death of the two villainous daughters, and old Lear eſcapes his wretchedneſs, and ſurvives the piece; though indeed Cordelia's being dead, makes even his eſcape very pathetic: However, Romeo and Juliet, and Lear, are the two moſt pathetic tragedies; and juſt that circumſtance of Romeo's forgetting his being poiſoned, ſuperior to any thing.

De

De cette paſſion la ſenſible peinture
Eſt pour aller au cœur la route la plus ſûre.
Peignez donc, j'y conſens, les heros amoureux,
Mais ne m'en formez pas des bergers doucereux.
Qu'Achille aime autrement que Thyrſis & Philene.
N'allez pas d'un Cyrus nous faire un Artamene:
Et que l'amour, ſouvent de remors combattu,
Paroiſſe une foibleſſe, & non une vertu *.

Shakeſpear has painted this paſſion with great propriety, in ſome other tragedies; but the picture in Romeo and Juliet is much ſuperior to any of the reſt: And yet Romeo's ſudden paſſion for Juliet, after having been ſo deeply in love with Roſaline, is certainly a great defect, and accordingly Mr. Garrick has left out the firſt paſſion in the piece, as he has altered it. In Antony and Cleopatra, love is alſo drawn with propriety. Mr. Rowe, in his Fair Penitent, has given us a very

* Oeuvres de Boileau, Amſt. edit. tom. i. p. 191.

affecting

affecting tragedy founded entirely on a love-plot, and that paſſion appears in its proper colours. And in his Royal Convert, the love of Aribert and Ethelinda is extremely moving. Dr. Young has ſucceeded very nobly in painting this paſſion; that of Alonzo, in the Revenge, is highly intereſting; but Carlos's giving up Leonora, is rather unnatural; yet the inward conflicts of his mind are well drawn, and very affecting. This author, in the Brothers, has alſo given us a very natural picture of love; that of Demetrius is attended with ſome of the moſt pathetic ſtrokes that ever were wrote.

Mr. Whitehead, in the firſt part of his Roman Father, has given us a natural picture of love in Horatia's paſſion for Curiatius; but at laſt, when her brother Publius not only kills her lover, but reproaches

reproaches her with her paſſion, ſhe forgets her love, fully forgives him (though he had alſo ſtabbed herſelf), and preaches forth the ſentiments rather of an old flinty ſenator, than a tender loving maid. Love is too powerful a paſſion; it poſſeſſes the ſoul too fully to permit ſuch a mixture of oppoſing ſentiments. The fable of this tragedy might, with ſeveral material alterations, be rendered a very good one; but at preſent it is one of the worſt I know. Inſtead of our terror and compaſſion, it raiſes nothing but our horror and deteſtation: The action of Publius's murdering his ſiſter Horatia, is infinitely too ſhocking for the ſtage; and yet the pity for her fate, which might have attended her, is all loſt in a jumble of contradictions during the whole fifth act. The ſenſations raiſed by that cataſtrophe, are all divided and ruined by the

ſtuff

ſtuff that follows, which can ſcarcely be reckoned a part of the action. There is ſomething amazingly unnatural and improbable in Horatia's ſcheme of provoking her brother to kill her: She dies almoſt unlamented by the audience. And as to the brutal father and ſavage ſon, inſtead of any pity attending them, we cannot but leave the theatre with a regret upon our minds at Publius's eſcaping the puniſhment his ferocious villany deſerves. It is in vain to aſſert the amazing patriotic ſpirit of the Romans; I anſwer, a poet ſhould chuſe ſuch ſubjects as are proper for tragedy: This Stoical patriotiſm, which degenerates into barbarity, will never move our pity on the ſtage. I do not know a tragedy, at which our compaſſion is ſo little moved: When firſt we hear that the Curiatii are oppoſed to the Horatii, we then indeed pity Horatia's melancholy

melancholy ſituation; but all ſuch ſentiments are utterly loſt in the fifth act, which, in my humble opinion, is ſo wretchedly compoſed (I mean the fable) as to counteract every ſentiment a tragedy ought to leave on the minds of an audience.—The language of the piece is, in general, chaſte and manly, and ſome of the ſentiments very noble; but in point of fable and characters, few tragedies are ſo faulty.

SECT. IV.

THE tragedy of the Brothers is one of the beſt that has appeared on our ſtage for many years. I believe I ſhall not be thought extravagant in my praiſe of it, in ſaying that both it and the Revenge are far more intereſting, pathetic, and affecting; in ſhort, that they are

much better tragedies than any Mr. Rowe ever wrote. In the former, we ſee the diſtreſs of the piece wrought up to a great pitch. What can be more affecting than the fourth and fifth acts, particularly the interview in the fourth, between Demetrius and Erixene, where ſhe imagines him falſe, and treats him with ſcorn? In the ſame act Demetrius intreats Perſius to give up Erixene, in the moſt moving manner. The poet, with great judgment, makes Philip agree to the condemnation of his ſon, as that ſtroke in the fable gives riſe to a pathetic diſtreſs, when Demetrius aſks mercy of his father. The unravelling this plot is alſo managed in a very maſterly manner; and when Demetrius is in chains, and Erixene preſent, his preventing her leaving him with theſe moving words, is alſo very pathetic:

Thus

Thus I arreſt you, in the name of mercy,
And dare compel your ſtay: Is then one look,
One word, one moment, a laſt moment too,
When I ſtand tottering on the brink of death,
A cruel ignominious death, too much
For one that loves like me? A length of years
You may devote to my bleſs'd rival's arms,
I aſk but one ſhort moment. O permit,
Permit the dying to lay claim to thee,
To thee, thou dear equivalent for life, —
Cruel, relentleſs, marble-hearted maid!

The officer who guards him, ſoon after tells him,

My lord, your time is ſhort, and death waits for you.
Erix. Death?—I forgive thee from my inmoſt ſoul.

Nothing can be more ſtriking than the pauſe in this line after, *Death?* — The pathetic is better expreſſed in a ſingle word, that comes naturally and immediately from the ſoul, than in a whole page of ſing-ſong poetry.

The officer again warns him:

My lord, your final moment is expir'd.
Dem. and Erix. One, one ſhort moment more.
Dem. No; death lets fall
The curtain, and divides our loves for ever.
[*Is forced out.*

This ſcene is truly moving, and prepares the audience to expect the cataſtrophe. Antigonus meets Erixene, and tells us that Demetrius is innocent; diſplays to her the treachery of Perſeus, who had ſo wrongfully accuſed, and procured the condemnation of his brother: Erixene, who had married Perſius merely through revenge at the imagined perfidy of his brother, here ſwoons away in aſtoniſhment. Demetrius comes, and the ſcene between him and her is exceſſively pathetic. She conceals, under ſome myſterious anſwers, the fatal truth; while Demetrius's ſoul pours itſelf out in a flood

flood of tranſport; he changes his tone, and demands the ſecret that fills her anxious mind: She ſoon anſwers,

Thence ariſe
Black gods of execration and deſpair!
Though dreadful earthquakes cleave your upward way,
While nature ſhakes, and vapours blot the ſun;
Then thro' thoſe horrors in loud groans proclaim,
That I am ——

Dem. What?—I'll have it, tho' it blaſt me.

Erix. Thus then in thunder—I am Perſeus' wife.

[*Demetrius falls againſt the ſcene. After a pauſe,*

In thunder?—No, that had not ſtruck ſo deep, &c.

Demetrius's exclamations, the diſorder of his mind, and the agony of his heart till Erixene ſtabs herſelf, and his following her example, in ſpite of his father, who endeavours to prevent it, all conſpire to work up the diſtreſs and terror of the cataſtrophe to the higheſt pitch. Mr. Rowe never wrote any thing equal to this admirable tragedy.

The Revenge, another tragedy of this author, which is founded entirely on a love-plot, I regard as his maſter-piece. This is the fable: Zanga, a Mooriſh prince, was taken captive by Don Alonzo, the Spaniſh general, and placed near his own perſon. Zanga tells us, in the firſt act, that about ſix years ago his maſter ſtruck him; that blow ſunk deep into his ſoul, and he vowed revenge: this is the hinge on which the fable turns. Carlos, the friend of Alonzo, being taken priſoner, deputed him to talk to Leonora, with whom he was in love, to ſecure the intereſt which Carlos had in her boſom, as her father deſigned him for her huſband. Alonzo fell in love with her himſelf; ſhe receives Carlos coolly, but declares a mutual paſſion for Alonzo: Carlos in the mean time receives advice, that a fleet, richly freighted

from

from the Eaſt, in which the moſt conſiderable part of his fortune was embarked, periſhed in a violent ſtorm; the father of Leonora no longer approves the match, and abſolutely refuſes to permit him to marry his daughter. Zanga adviſes Alonzo to aſk Carlos to reſign her to him; his friendſhip prevents him; but the Moor, meeting with Carlos, tells him how unhappy his friend is, and adviſes him to yield his miſtreſs, but without ſucceſs; however, Alonzo coming to them, after a long and moving conflict in both their minds, Carlos reſigns her, and ſhe is married to Alonzo. It was in part by Zanga's inſtigation that this was effected, and he had formed a ſcheme to bring about this marriage, and then to make Alonzo jealous of his friend: for this purpoſe Zanga forged a letter from Carlos to Leonora, which conveyed

The moſt profound acknowledgement of heart
For wond'rous tranſports, which he never knew.

It was dropped by Iſabella, Zanga's wife, in the bride's apartment: Alonzo there found it; a glance of it gave riſe to a thouſand fears in his boſom; and, leſt the contents of it ſhould be worſe than he ſuſpected, he kept the letter unread; meeting with Zanga, he ſhewed it him, who reads it with the utmoſt ſeeming concern, and then tears it to pieces: For a while he pretends to conceal the purport of it from him, but by broken hints and artful ſpeeches he raiſes Alonzo's jealouſy to a high pitch; at laſt, after ſome apologies for telling him a ſecret, he begins:

Know then, Don Carlos ——
Alon. Oh!
Zang. You cannot bear it.
Alon. Go on; I'll have it, tho' it blaſt mankind: I'll have it, and inſtantly. — Go on.

Zang.

Zang. Don Carlos did return at dead of night—
Enter Leonora..

The poet's art in making Leonora come in juſt as Zanga had begun a tale, which muſt throw Alonzo almoſt into a phrenzy, is exquiſite. In Hamlet we meet with a ſimilar ſtroke; the ſentinel recounting the adventure of the ghoſt, ſays,

Laſt night of all,
When yon ſame ſtar, that's weſtward from the pole,
That made his courſe t'illume that part of heav'n
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myſelf,
The bell then beating one ——
Enter the Ghoſt.
Mar. Peace, break thee off;
Look, where it comes.

Nothing can exceed the judgment that made Shakeſpear break off here; it raiſes the curioſity of the audience, and gives him a fine opportunity to avoid a long circumſtantial narration: it is in ſuch ſtrokes of invention as theſe that we muſt admire

admire the art of a poet. It muſt be allowed that Dr. Young has introduced a ſimilar excellency with great art; and in his tragedy it has a peculiar good effect, as it leaves Alonzo in the higheſt pitch of agony. — Leonora, ſeeing him diſturbed, enquires the reaſon; he anſwers, he is full of nothing but the thought of her; upon which ſhe leaves him. Zanga then proceeds with his diabolical tale, relates, that when he commanded the watch, Carlos demanded entrance, pretending to have letters from Alonzo, who was with the army; being admitted, Zanga preſently after ſees him lead forth Leonora from a bower in the garden, after hearing the tender exclamations of love between them. Alonzo, unable to bear this tale, ſinks into a chair, when the Moor reproaches him for his want of reſolution. He then breaks into furious

exclama-

exclamations, almoſt loſes his ſenſes, and at laſt determines to murder them in the bower, and orders Zanga to wait there with his dagger. Leonora then comes to her huſband, ſtill enquiring the reaſon of his appearing ſo much caſt down; he diſſembles with her for ſome time, and at laſt breaks from her, and tells her to go to her chamber. Alonzo then determines to kill himſelf; but Zanga, fearing that event, ſays,

You cannot cloſe an eye that is ſo bright;
You cannot ſtrike a breaſt that is ſo ſoft;
That has ten thouſand ecſtacies in ſtore—
For Carlos? — No, my lord; I mean for you.

Nothing could be more artful than this ſpeech of Zanga's; his reminding him of her love for Carlos, and the ecſtaſies they would enjoy, was likely to rouze all his jealouſy; but finding that had not its deſired effect, he proceeds:

But

But when he finds Alonzo is no more,
How will he ruſh like lightning to her arms?
There ſigh, there languiſh, there pour out his ſoul;
But not in grief — ſad obſequies to thee —
But thou wilt be at peace, nor ſee, nor hear
The burning kiſs, the ſigh of ecſtacy,
Their throbbing hearts that joſtle one another;
Thank heav'n, theſe torments will be all my own.
Alon. I'll eaſe thee of that pain: let Carlos die;
O'ertake him on the road, and ſee it done.
'Tis my command. [*Gives his ſignet.*

Even this does not ſatisfy the implacable Zanga; he at laſt works him up to determine the murder of Leonora. In the fifth act we find Zanga reporting to Alonzo the death of Carlos; and in the ſecond ſcene Alonzo enters the bower where Leonora is ſleeping, with his dagger; he intends to murder her, but, ſtruck with her charms, drops his dagger without knowing it, and leaves her. Zanga enters the bower juſt as Leonora ſees the dagger; he, fearing that would diſcover

diſcover his whole villany, determines to tell her of her huſband's jealouſy, thinking their mutual upbraiding each other may work out their ruin. She directly goes to Alonzo; after a moſt pathetic and well-imagined ſcene between them, ſhe ſays,

Repent!

Alon. Is that for me?
Leon. Fall, aſk my pardon.
Alon. Aſtoniſhment!
Leon. Dar'ſt thou perſiſt to think I am diſhoneſt?
Alon. I know thee ſo.
Leon. This blow then to thy heart. [*She ſtabs herſelf.*

Leonora is led out dying; and Alonzo calls for Zanga, who ſoon tells him,

Zang. Your anguiſh is to come;
You much have been abus'd.
Alon. Abus'd! by whom?
Zang. To know, were little comfort.
Alon. Oh! 'twere much.
Zang. Indeed!
Alon. By heav'n. O give him to my fury!

Zang.

Zang. Born for your uſe, I live but to oblige you:
Know then, 'twas — I.
Alon. Am I awake?
Zang. For ever.
Thy wife is guiltleſs; that's one tranſport to me:
And I, I let thee know it; that's another.
I urg'd Don Carlos to reſign his miſtreſs;
I forg'd the letter; I diſpos'd the picture;
I hated; I deſpis'd; and I deſtroy.

Soon after he goes on,

Who am I? I know thou ſay'ſt
The Moor, a ſlave, an abject, beaten ſlave:
(Eternal woes to him that made me ſo!)
But look again. Has ſix years cruel bondage
Extinguiſh'd majeſty ſo far, that nought
Shines here, to give an awe of one above thee?

Alonzo then breaks into ſome pathetic exclamations; and Zanga concludes a ſpeech,

Fare thee well —
Now fully ſatisfy'd, I ſhould take leave;
But one thing grieves me; ſince thy death is near,
I leave thee my example how to die.

Here Alonzo prevents his ſtabbing himſelf; and Zanga tells him,

As I have been a vulture to thy heart,
So will I be a raven to thine ear,
And true as ever ſnuff'd the ſcent of blood,
As ever flapp'd its heavy wing againſt
The window of the ſick, and croak'd deſpair:
Thy wife is dead!

Alonzo, who, when he had diſarmed the Moor, hid the dagger in his boſom, now ſtabs himſelf with it, and the tragedy concludes with a pathetic ſpeech of Zanga's to the dead body of Alonzo, in which his inhuman mind relents, and he cries out,

O vengeance! I have follow'd thee too far,
And to receive me hell blows all her fires.

Many readers will, I doubt not, think I advance a paradox, when I prefer the cataſtrophe of this noble tragedy to that of Othello. The latter, though one of the fineſt

fineſt pieces Shakeſpear wrote, abounds in many barbarities, which greatly weaken the pathetic; and Zanga's telling Alonzo himſelf that he was the author of all his miſery, is infinitely greater than Iago's treachery being diſcovered by his wife. In Zanga we ſee his revenge concluded in the moſt reſolute and determinate manner; but in Iago it is a piece of cunning contrivance, which concludes pitifully. It is highly neceſſary in England, ſo great is Shakeſpear's reputation, to be very guarded in any compariſons of other tragedies with his; yet I cannot but think the fable and cataſtrophe of the Revenge far ſuperior to that of Othello. I am as paſſionate an admirer of Shakeſpear as any man; and it ſhould be remembered, I compare theſe two pieces in that reſpect which was not that great man's talent, his fable. In reſpect to character, the

perſon-

perſonages in the Revenge are not ſo nicely pourtrayed as in Othello; and indeed who would compare Dr. Young and Shakeſpear for drawing characters? There is a vaſt number of thoſe amazing ſtrokes of fancy and rapturous ſentiment in Othello, which are in every one's memory, and which make us revere the piece that contains them, that are not to be found ſo plentifully in the Revenge (though there are many fine ſtrokes in it.) In ſhort, I do not compare theſe tragedies, only in reſpect of fable; but yet I think the fable ſo very important in every tragedy, and ſo well managed in Dr. Young's, that I own the repreſentation of the Revenge moves my terror and pity in the higheſt degree, far more than Othello. The cataſtrophe is brought about ſo diſtinctly, and with ſo much art and nobleneſs as finely ſuits that ſuſpence

which fixes the attention to one point. The characters alſo in the Revenge are, in my humble opinion, far more truly tragic than in Othello, and more apt to raiſe our compaſſion (I repeat again, that I do not compare the art of painting mankind in the two poets; had Shakeſpear wrote a tragedy with ſuch a fable as the Revenge, it would have been infinitely beyond Dr. Young's.) Othello being *Moor* from the very beginning, hints the emotions which riſe in the ſpectators boſom. At the beginning of the play, ſeveral characters of the drama appear merely to introduce the fable, like Brabantio, &c. and ſome of theſe continue throughout, which greatly weakens the attention. Don Carlos, in the Revenge, increaſes the pathetic of the piece far more than Caſſio does; and as for Leonora,

ra, one cannot compare Deſdemona to her *.

SECT. V.

THE examen of the Revenge alone would be ſufficient to convince us of the truth of Ariſtotle's maxim, that the fable is the principal part of tragedy. The very events themſelves are enough to kindle the paſſions, which is the end of tragedy. A great fault in ſome of Shakeſpear's pieces, is the bad connection of his incidents; the events do not naturally riſe out of each other, but are joined by epiſodes, that might

* I ſhould not have ventured on this compariſon of the fables of theſe two noble tragedies, had not my opinion been ſupported by that of a moſt ſenſible and ingenious lady, whom I ſhall diſtinguiſh by the name of Clementina, who is greatly prejudiced in favour of our immortal bard, and than whom few men are better judges.

very well be ſpared from his fable, without injuring it, had it been well managed. The neceſſary conſequence of this management, is dividing the terror and pity in the minds of the audience, which ought wholly to be carried towards the principal perſonage in the piece. M. de Voltaire has compoſed ſeveral tragedies on moſt noble ſubjects. The fable of his Semiramis is excellent, and finely adapted to raiſe the pity and terror of an audience. Semiramis, queen of the Eaſt, in conjunction with Aſſur, a prince of the royal family, murders her huſband king Ninus; and Aſſur, to open his way to the throne, ordered Ninias, her ſon to be diſpatched. After this action ſhe reigns alone for fifteen years. At the time the action of the piece begins, ſhe is overwhelmed with ſorrow, remorſe, and guilt, which are more immediately occaſioned by her being

ing ſeveral times terrified at ſeeing the ghoſt of Ninus, and other dreadful ſupernatural appearances and noiſes. Ninus, ſuſpecting a deſign on his ſon, conveyed him away to his friend Phradates, who brought him up as his ſon, under the name of Arzaces: He proves a great captain, and commands againſt the Scythians with ſucceſs. On his return to Babylon he meets with his friend Mitranes, and the piece opens with the converſation between them: He relates that his (ſuppoſed) father, on his death-bed, gave him a precious caſket to deliver to the high-prieſt, which he accordingly does in the next ſcene. The high-prieſt introduces him to Semiramis, who has longed to ſee him, as the ſupernatural voice had declared, that on his arrival her anxiety ſhould have an end: And as ſhe hated Aſſur, ſhe deſigned to raiſe up Arzaces

as a rival to his power: And as an oracle had declared the empire's luſtre ſhould be reſtored on her *kindling anew the torch of Hymen*, ſhe determines to marry Arzaces. Accordingly all the court are by her orders aſſembled in a magnificent ſalon, together with the high-prieſt and magi; and ſhe declares to them that Arzaces is the hero ſhe weds. At that inſtant claps of thunder are heard, and the tomb of Ninus (the ſcene is laid in ſight of it) ſhaking, his ghoſt riſes from the monument, and addreſſing Arzaces, declares he ſhall aſcend the throne, but that he muſt firſt expiate ſome crimes by blood in the tomb, and be directed by the high-prieſt; who informs him of the ſecret of his birth and the murder of his father, and gives him the letter which Ninus wrote with him to Phradates. Arzaces, thus ſaved from inceſt, in an interview

terview with the queen, ſhews her this letter, and repairs to the tomb to execute the ghoſt's injunctions. In the mean time Semiramis is informed that Aſſur had plotted the deſtruction of her ſon, and was gone to the tomb to murder him; ſhe repairs thither herſelf, armed, in his defence: And Ninias (otherwiſe Arzaces) hearing alſo of Aſſur's being in the tomb, thinks it the guidance of the gods that he ſhould there fall by his hand, and therefore haſtens to kill him. In a dark part of the monument he thinks he ſees him, and plunges his ſword into his breaſt; but ſoon after he finds his miſtake, and diſcovers that he has ſlain his mother: She comes forth wounded, and, after making a repentant pathetic ſpeech, expires.

This is the outline of the fable of this tragedy, which is exceſſively pathetic.

Semiramis having been a wicked woman, her death would have been mere poetic juſtice, and occaſioned little of the pathetic; nor would the fate of Aſſur, who is ordered to execution, been moving; but Ninias being himſelf the executioner of his own mother, is a ſtroke infinitely pathetic and terrible: this circumſtance, and the repentance of Semiramis, render the cataſtrophe very moving. There is an epiſode in the piece, which I have taken no notice of. Azema is a princeſs of the blood, in love with, and beloved by Arzaces. Aſſur alſo wants to ſtrengthen his right to the crown by wedding her. She ſeems introduced that love may not be excluded from the piece; but in this M. Voltaire did not follow his own rules, for he has in many paſſages in his works diſplayed the neceſſity of that paſſion being predominant, or quite baniſhed. —

This

This is one of thoſe pieces wrote ſomewhat in our taſte. It is plain the author had Hamlet in his eye throughout it; he has managed his fable in general with judgment; and the thunder and the ghoſt of Ninus riſing out of the tomb, are finely and awfully introduced.

If noble ſentiments and the charms of language were of the greateſt importance in the conſtitution of a tragedy, Cato would be one of the moſt affecting in our language; but as that celebrated piece is far from poſſeſſing the moſt eſſential merit of tragedy, a ſhort view of it will convince us that the defect lies in the fable.

It is not an old man's falling on his ſword, the death of another in battle, or a dead corpſe brought on a ſtage, that are

are circumſtances which will of themſelves raiſe either terror or pity. It is the chuſing a ſubject tragical in its nature; and the incidents riſing naturally out of each other, in the cataſtrophe produces an event which ſurprizes the ſpectator, and overpowers the ſoul with compaſſion. One great excellency in tragedy is the keeping the cataſtrophe a ſecret till the event is brought about; if an audience foreſee it, the poet deprives himſelf of the advantage which a ſurprizing and unforeſeen event always gives. In a piece where this conduct is obſerved, the ſouls of the ſpectators are in ſuſpence during the whole repreſentation. The abbé du Bos collects many reaſons to prove that poets ſhould chuſe for their ſubjects, events which have happened a long while before the time in which they write: But to add the beauty of ſurprize

to

to a tragedy, it is not only neceſſary that the event ſhould be remote, but it ſhould alſo be little known. King Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, and many more moſt excellent tragedies, are either founded on hiſtorical events but little known, or the fable is merely fiction. If the event is well known, as in the deaths of Brutus, Cato, Cæſar, Earl of Eſſex, Lady Jane Gray, and many more, the advantage of ſurprize and ſuſpence is loſt; unleſs, indeed, he creates under-characters, whoſe fate we know not; which cannot but injure his fable by dividing the attention.

Now the fable of the tragedy of Cato has all the diſadvantages I have mentioned. Let the poet handle this ſubject how he will, the cataſtrophe ſtill will be Cato's falling on his ſword; an event which I cannot but pronounce not proper

per for a tragedy. This opinion will not occaſion much ſurprize, if we conſider how little we are moved at reading or ſeeing the repreſentation of it. An old rough Roman, who had no other choice but killing himſelf, or becoming a ſubject to his enemy, who offered him generous terms, is the ſubject of this tragedy, independent of its epiſodes, which are very numerous. Had the unity of action been obſerved, yet Cato would not have been a good tragedy, as the fable is faulty: But that unity is deſtroyed by two of the moſt vicious epiſodes that could be introduced, the loves of Marcia and Portia. Nothing can be a clearer proof of this than the little connection there is between them and the main plot; ſo that if we ſtrike them entirely out of the play, the fable will be improved. Cato is a fine wrote dialogue

on

on the love of one's country; but, from the imperfections of its fable, very improper for tragedy *.

The

* Le mérite eſſentiel à une piece de théâtre pour plaire à la repréſentation, n'eſt pas le même qu'il lui faut pour plaire à la lecture. Une bonne piece mal écrite, mauvaiſe même en détail, remplie de penſées fauſſes, ſouvent mal-conduite, & bonne ſeulement par un fond intéreſſant, peut charmer les ſpectateurs. Une piece mauvaiſe pour le fond, & même pour la conduite, mais très-bien écrite, ſur-tout ſi elle eſt en vers, peut faire grand plaiſir à quelques lecteurs.

Eſſais ſur divers Sujets de Litterature, tome iv. p. 278.

Cato ſucceeded greatly on the ſtage for ſome time, but it was owing in a great meaſure to the ſtate of parties: However, being adapted in a great meaſure to the French taſte, it was received in ſeveral parts of Europe with great applauſe. It was immediately tranſlated into French and Italian, and acted in moſt of the languages in Chriſtendom. The French tranſlation of M. Boyer was publiſhed at London in 1717. The abbé du Bos likewiſe tranſlated it: but only the three firſt ſcenes of that verſion were printed *.

* See Supplement to the Nouvelles Literaires, for the 17th of October, 1716.

We

The cry againſt modern tragedy has for ſome years been ſo loud and univerſal, that it is a little dangerous not to join in the faſhion of the times; yet I muſt

We have an Italian tranſlation by the abbot Salvini; and this tragedy having been acted at Leghorn, during the carnival, by the Academici Compattiti, it was received with ſuch prodigious applauſe, that the author was obliged to publiſh it in Florence *. Mr. Tickell ſays, that he has not been able to learn, whether that of Signor Valetta, a young Neapolitan nobleman, has ever been made public. We have a Latin tranſlation of the celebrated ſoliloquy of Cato, in the beginning of the fifth act of that tragedy, which, as the publiſher of it in the Spectator obſerves †, for conciſeneſs, purity, and elegance of phraſe, cannot be ſufficiently admired. This is ſaid to have been done by the late Dr. Francis Atterbury, biſhop of Rocheſter. The Engliſh college of Jeſuits at St. Omer's, tranſlated the whole tragedy into Latin, and had it acted by their pupils there, with vaſt magnificence and prodigious applauſe. They ſent a copy of their verſion over to Mr. Addiſon.

* Nouvelles Liter. du 25 Juliet, 1716.
† No. 628. vol. viii.

quote

quote a piece, whoſe fable is far ſuperior to that of Cato; I mean Barbaroſſa. This tragedy has the very contrary kind of merit to Addiſon's piece; the two poets cannot be compared. The ſentiments in Cato are far more noble, and the language infinitely more chaſte, more nervous, and more elegant; yet Barbaroſſa is the moſt tragic ſtory; the fable is more excellent, and raiſes more terror in the minds both of readers and ſpectators. — Barbaroſſa uſurps the throne of Algiers againſt the right of young Selim; and, to ſecure his authority, endeavours to wed the murdered king's widow. Selim flies from Algiers, and two ſlaves are diſpatched to murder him, one of whom bears Barbaroſſa's ſignet, which he is to convey as a meſſenger of Selim's death. The young prince kills them, and he who poſſeſſed the ſignet, gave it him, and,

with

with his dying words, told him its uſe. Selim dreſſes himſelf in the ſlave's cloaths, and carries the news of his own pretended death to Barbaroſſa. He concerts methods for deſtroying the tyrant, which occaſions a rumour being ſpread that he is alive: He is then brought again before Barbaroſſa, and while that tyrant orders his guards to ſeize the queen, Selim aims a blow at the heart of Barbaroſſa, but miſſes, and is diſarmed. He is then led to the rack; but, before the execution, his friends murder the ſentinels, burſt the palace gates, ſet him at liberty, and kill Barbaroſſa. This is the fable, without a few epiſodes which naturally riſe out of the ſubject; for though the ſhort ſcene between Selim and Irene, Barbaroſſa's daughter, may ſeem at firſt ſuperfluous, yet in fact the cataſtrophe turns on it, as Barbaroſſa was informed by that means of Selim's being alive.

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This ſketch of the fable of Barbaroſſa will alone ſhew how much more proper the ſubject was for tragedy, than that of Cato. In fact, it is one of the beſt fables of thoſe tragedies which end happily; and is ſo little epiſodical, that all the attention of the audience is entirely engroſſed on the fate of Selim. The ſoul is in a continual ſuſpence, and the paſſion of terror touched to a very great degree. Yet the adherence to thoſe cramping unities, has in this fable occaſioned a great want of thoſe critical incidents and ſituations, which give the poet the fine opportunity of exhibiting character in perfection; in which, and ſentiment, and language the piece is very indifferent; but I only quote its fable. And yet that lies under the greateſt diſadvantage of ending happily, which alone is a terrible enemy to the pity which all tragedies ſhould raiſe.

Notwithſtanding the fable of Barbaroſſa being ſo incomplete, yet there is ſomething in the Stoical character of Cato ſo repugnant to tragedy, that I cannot but aſſert its inferiority.

Much the ſame may be ſaid of the fable of Douglas; in which the unities are alſo preſerved, the incidents riſe naturally from one another, and the cataſtrophe is extremely affecting. Lady Randolph's rejoicing at Douglas's ſafety, but ſuddenly diſcovering that he is wounded, and their parting ſpeeches at his death, are exceſſively affecting: and it certainly is a merit, that as Mr. Home did not chuſe a love-plot, he ſhould reject that paſſion entirely. But yet this tragedy is not without defects. It has been obſerved, that Douglas bears too great a reſemblance to Merope; Matilda, young Douglas,

Douglas, and Norval, are evidently modelled, feature for feature, on Merope, Dorilas, and Narbas. This gave the play a great diſadvantage, as it almoſt deſtroyed the uncertainty of the cataſtrophe; for every body gueſſed, on the young man's firſt appearance, that he was the ſon of Matilda. There are alſo ſome unneceſſary interviews and ſoliloquies; the ſecond act is only entirely free from them. The ſecond ſcene of the firſt act is of this kind, as it lets us into no ſecret, but what we are more amply informed of in the expoſition ſcene between Matilda and Anna*; it introduces but lamely the character of Randolph; and anſwers ſcarce any other end but to give Matilda an opportunity of ſpeaking the ſpeech beginning,

War I deteſt; ——

* Vide Theatrical Review, p. 72.

which has been generally thought very fine: But ſuch great excellency I cannot perceive in it. The greateſt part of the fourth act is quite ſuperfluous; and tho' the narration of Douglas is fine, yet *non erat his locus.* Agis and the Siege of Aquileia were wrote by the ſame hand, but are much inferior to Douglas; the latter has little or no merit.

The Mourning Bride of Congreve is a tragedy which has met with various opinions concerning its merit; ſome praiſing it in as warm terms as others have condemned it *. The fable of it is certainly faulty. The whole part of Zara (the chief in the play) is an epiſode,

* Warton, in the Eſſay on Pope, calls it *a deſpicable tragedy.* And lord Kaimes ſays, that in it "Regularity concurs with the beauty of ſentiment and language, to make it one of the moſt complete pieces England has to boaſt of."

which,

which, with a few ſlight alterations, might be extracted, and leave the action more complete without, than with it. And yet Zara is the principal perſon in the play: She is painted in ſuch rapid colours, ſuch violent paſſions, and ſuch a daring ſoul, that the audience ever gives the firſt attention to her. Now if the poet meant her as his heroine, her fate ſhould move all our pity; and then the parts of Oſmyn and Almeira would be vicious and but ſecondary: But as they are meant for the principal characters, Zara quite eclipſes them; we expect more the conſequence of her turbulent paſſions, than the fate of the ſuffering Almeira. Was our pity to be raiſed much at her death, the aim of the piece would be abſolutely deſtroyed; the poet therefore gave her that mixed character, and this occaſioned another fault, to eſcape a greater: that

perſonage who attracts all our attention in the play, is not the heroine, and dies at laſt without our compaſſion: Conſequently our ſentiments thus divided and broken, we can neither feel thoroughly for the danger of Almeira and Oſmyn through the courſe of the piece, nor fully rejoice at their happineſs in the cataſtrophe of it. For though Zara does not overwhelm us with pity, yet her fate gives us a mixed ſentiment, ſo that inſtead of being wholly intereſted in Almeira's joy, we are partly touched at Zara's unhappy end, *who had a ſoul of godlike mold, intrepid, and commanding* the attention of the audience. Mr. Addiſon very juſtly obſerves, after agreeing with Ariſtotle in favour of pieces that end unhappily, " Terror and commiſeration leave a pleaſing anguiſh in the mind, and fix the audience in ſuch a ſerious compoſure

compoſure of thought, as is much more laſting and delightful, than any little tranſient ſtarts of joy and ſatisfaction."

This ſhort examination of ſome fables of modern tragedy, will, I think, be ſufficient to prove that Ariſtotle's maxim, of the ſubject being the moſt important part, yet holds true: Ἔτι ἐάν τις ἐφεξῆς θῇ φύσεις ἠθικὰς, καὶ λέξεις καὶ διανοίας εὖ πεποιημένας, ἐ ποιήσει ὃ ἦν τῆς τραγῳδίας ἔργον, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ καταδεεστέροις τούτοις κεχρημένη τραγῳδία, ἔχουσα δὲ μῦθον καὶ σύστασιν πραγμάτων. ΠΕΡΙ ΠΟΙΗΤ. cap. vi.

SECT. VI.

NEXT to the fable, the characters of tragedy ſhould be conſidered, under which title I include Ariſtotle's two diviſions, of Manners and Sentiment. Every character in the poem ought to

have ſome diſtinguiſhing trait; for nothing diſplays greater poverty of invention than not marking the characters with ſome paſſion, that varies and contraſts them. Homer and Shakeſpear are by far the moſt excellent in this art. The former has drawn Achilles, Agamemnon, Neſtor, &c. all ſo different, that we might with a tolerable penetration aſſign each ſpeech to its author, if we did not ſee his name at the head of it. Shakeſpear, with the ſame art, throughout his beſt plays, has prodigiouſly varied his characters; every ſpeech they make, contains the ſentiments natural to the paſſions and diſpoſition with which he has marked them. This conduct throws a moſt pleaſing variety over the piece; and by giving riſe to oppoſite ſentiments, muſt greatly enliven every part.—Thus, in the Brothers, we are entertained with three of a different

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ent caſt, and each ſtrongly marked *. Philip is diſtinguiſhed by a warmth of temper, and haughtineſs of ſoul, and a tenderneſs for his children, that runs over in the moſt affecting manner: Perſeus is a different villain from any we have ſeen upon the ſtage; policy and bravery are ſo blended in him, that we ſee their mixed effects in every ſcene: And Demetrius is of ſo amiable a diſpoſition, that an audience muſt be naturally inclined to love him, and, for his ſake, to dread the reſtleſs turbulent ſpirit of Perſeus.

They both are bright; but one
Benignly bright, as ſtars to mariners;
And one a comet, with malignant blaze,
Denouncing ruin.

Critics are divided concerning the proper characters for the principal per-

* Vide Gray's Inn Journal.

ſonages

ſonages of tragedy; it having been generally thought that they ought always to be kings, princes, or heroes: but ſurely it is a falſe maxim, to ſuppoſe that ſubjects taken from familiar life may not be proper to raiſe both terror and compaſſion. Romeo and Juliet I produce as a proof, that one of the moſt affecting tragedies on the Engliſh theatre is formed without the aſſiſtance of thoſe great perſonages; for the prince has little or nothing to do in the play. Mr. Rowe's Fair Penitent, though not an excellent tragedy, is alſo ſufficient to contradict the notion; and Otway's Orphan may be mentioned as an additional proof. Venice Preſerved is, indeed, of a more public nature; but the chief diſtreſs lies amongſt perſons of middling rank. It muſt, nevertheleſs, be allowed, that the fineſt tragedies which have ever been

written,

written, have kings and princes, &c. for their heroes.

Concerning the other perſonages of a tragedy, although they ſhould be diſtinguiſhed from one another, yet, as the chief diſtreſs does not fall on them, it is not of ſuch great importance what characters they conſiſt of. A villain, as the abbé du Bos obſerves, ſhould never be the principal perſonage; and the greateſt fault in that admirable tragedy, Venice Preſerved *, is the two principal perſons in

* Monſ. d'Alembert has a remarkable opinion concerning the ſubject of this tragedy. "Rappellez vous, Monſieur, un de nos chefs-d'œuvre en ce genre, la Conjuration de Veniſe de l'abbé de St. Real, & l'eſpece d'intérêt qu'il nous inſpire (ſans l'avoir peut-être voulu) pour ces hommes qui ont juré la ruine de leur patrie; on s'afflige preſque après cette lecture de voir tant de courage, & d'habileté devenus inutiles; on ſe reproche ce ſentiment, mais il nous ſaiſit malgré

in it being villains. This weakens our pity; for ſuch a character as Pierre can never intereſt us; and although Jaffier is drawn in much more amiable colours, yet his turning a conſpirator and cut-throat, makes his cataſtrophe but a puniſhment for his wickedneſs: And when the principal event of a tragedy is but the reward of virtue, or the puniſhment of vice, our paſſions will no longer be rouſed. It is not the death of a Jaffier, or a Pierre hardened in villainy, that

gré nous, & ce n'eſt que par réflexion qu'on prend part au ſalut de Veniſe. Je vous avouerai à cette occaſion (contre l'opinion aſſez généralement établie) que le ſujet de *Veniſe ſauvée* me paroît bien plus propre au théatre que celui de *Manlius Capitolinus*, quoique ces deux pieces ne different guere que par les noms, & l'état des perſonnages; des malheureux qui conſpirent pour ſe rendre libres, ſont moins odieux que des ſénateurs qui cabalent pour ſe rendre maîtres."

Lettre à M. J. J. Rouſſeau, p. 25. See Oeuvres de Rouſſeau, vol. ii.

moves

moves us to ſhed tears; but the untimely end of a young Romeo ſnatched away in the vigour of youth, at the very moment when he was taſting the greateſt happineſs human nature is capable of receiving. Had Romeo been a villain, we ſhould not have pitied him; but he is painted in beautiful colours, a generous, open, brave, humane young nobleman, that cannot but intereſt the ſpectator in his favour. If there is one perſon that is deeply moved with compaſſion at the repreſentation of Macbeth, there will be forty at that of Romeo and Juliet, or King Lear.

But though a villain is ſo improper a perſonage for the hero of a tragedy, yet they are very proper ones for inferior characters, and by whoſe means the cataſtrophe may be brought about. Thus

Iago

Iago is introduced with great propriety in Othello; and his villany is a fine contraſt to the brave and open Moor: The ſame may be ſaid of Zanga. Nobody is concerned at the death of Barbaroſſa, who could not intereſt us; but every one is in ſuſpence when Selim is going to be murdered; and that young prince is in fact the chief perſonage.

It is allowable *, therefore, to introduce the perſonages of villains into a poem,

* On peut donc introduire des perſonnages ſcélerats dans un poëme, ainſi qu'on met des bourreaux dans le tableau qui repreſente le martyre d'un ſaint: Mais comme on blameroit le peintre qui dépeindroit aimables des hommes auxquels il fait faire une action odieuſe, de même on blameroit le poëte qui donneroit à des perſonnages ſcélerats des qualités capables de leur concilier la bienveillance du ſpectateur. Cette bienveillance pourroit aller juſqu'à faire plaindre le ſcélerat, & à diminuer l'horreur du crime par la compaſſion

poem, in the ſame manner as executioners have a place in a picture repreſenting a ſaint's martyrdom: but as a painter would be cenſured for rendering thoſe men amiable by their looks, whom he draws perpetrating an odious or flagitious action; in like manner a poet would be blamed for dreſſing his villanous perſonages with qualities capable of engaging the benevolence of the ſpectator. Such a benevolence might be carried ſo far as to render the villain an object of pity, and to diminiſh the horror of the crime by the compaſſion raiſed for the criminal. This would be acting diametrically oppoſite to the principal end of tragedy, to its deſign of purging the paſſions. Otway

compaſſion que donneroit le criminel. Voilà ce qui eſt entierement oppoſé au grand but de la tragédie, je veux dire à ſon deſſein de purger les paſſions.

Réflexions Critiques, tome i. § 15.

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tranſgreſſed very much when he painted Jaffier an amiable villain. Monſ. Rouſſeau, in his celebrated letter to d'Alembert, has ſome very juſt obſervations on the theatre: his remark on villains in tragedy is extremely juſt. " On me dira que dans ces pieces le crime eſt toujours puni, & la vertu toujours récompenſée. Je réponds que, quand cela ſeroit, la plûpart des actions tragiques, n'étant, que de pures fables, des évenemens qu'on ſait être de l'invention du poëte, ne font pas grande impreſſion ſur les ſpectateurs; à force de leur montrer qu'on veut les inſtruire, on ne les inſtruit plus. Je réponds encore que ces punitions & ces récompenſes s'operent toujours par des moyens ſi peu communs, qu'on n'attend rien de pareil dans le cours naturel des choſes humaines, Enfin, je réponds, en niant le fait. Il n'eſt, ni ne peut être

généralement vraie : car cet objet n'étant point celui ſur lequel les auteurs dirigent leurs pieces, ils doivent rarement l'atteindre, & ſouvent il ſeroit un obſtacle au ſuccès. Vice ou vertu qu'importe, pourvu qu'on en impoſe par un air de grandeur ? Auſſi la ſcene Françoiſe, ſans contredit la plus parfaite, ou du-moins la plus réguliere qui ait encore exiſté, n'eſt elle pas moins le triomphe des grands ſcélérats que des plus illuſtres héros : témoin Catilina, Mahomet, Atrée, & beaucoup d'autres." Oeuvres, tome ii. p. 46.

Shakeſpear had the art of ſupporting his characters to the higheſt degree of perfection. His Othello, Iago, Macbeth, Lear, &c. &c. are all drawn in the ſtrongeſt colours, and yet always ſupported : But his Caliban, as Mr. Warton has obſerved *, is the greateſt effort

* Adventurer, vol. iii. No. 93.

of the creative power of his lively imagination; for though entirely original, yet it is preſerved with ſo much conſiſtency, that if there was ſuch a monſter in nature, it would certainly poſſeſs thoſe ſentiments with which Shakeſpear has drawn him.

When a poet paints a particular character from his imagination, he ſhould take the greateſt care to preſerve it throughout his piece. If it is natural only in the firſt and ſecond acts, and flags afterwards, the ſpectator muſt neceſſarily be diſguſted. Caliban, Iago, and Zanga appear to the laſt, acting and ſpeaking in exact conformity to the paſſions with which they are drawn: Thus it was very natural for Caliban to curſe Proſpero and Miranda in that terrible manner,

As

As wicked dew, as e'er my mother bruſh'd,
With raven's feather, from unwholeſome fen,
Drop on you both!
All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!

Iago is painted a complete villain, perpetrating one of the moſt horrible actions; when we are acquainted with his character, we are not ſurprized at the exceſs of his wickedneſs, as the natural conſequence of his paſſions. Zanga, tormented with the deſire of revenge, ſpeaks quite in character when he curſes Alonzo and Leonora:

Why, get thee gone! horror and night go with thee!
Siſters of Acheron, go hand in hand;
Go, dance around the bow'r, and cloſe them in;
And tell them that I ſent you to ſalute them!
Prophane the ground; and, for th'ambroſial roſe,
And breath of jeſſamine, let hemlock blacken,
And deadly nightſhade poiſon all the air!
For the ſweet nightingale, may ravens croak,
Toads pant, and adders ruſtle thro' the leaves;

May ſerpents, winding up the trees, let fall
Their hiſſing necks upon them from above,
And mingle kiſſes — ſuch as I ſhould give them.

Hamlet was alſo one of theſe characters; for though Shakeſpear borrowed ſome part of his fable from hiſtory, yet he formed Hamlet from his own imagination. He is repreſented as a brave, ſenſible, and virtuous young prince; and his ſentiments throughout the tragedy are exact in nature. Though this character was eaſily drawn, yet under Shakeſpear's pen we always find even the moſt common receive an original air. He is ſcarce introduced, but he makes theſe reflections on his mother's conduct:

That it ſhould come to this!
But two months dead! nay, not ſo much, not two!
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a ſatyr: ſo loving to my mother,
That he permitted not the winds of heav'n

To

To viſit her face too roughly. Heav'n and earth!
Muſt I remember? Why ſhe would hang on him,
As if increaſe of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: And yet within a month!
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman!
A little month! or ere thoſe ſhoes were old
With which ſhe follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears; why ſhe, e'en ſhe —
Oh heav'n! a brute, that wants diſcourſe of reaſon,
Would have mourn'd longer—married with mine uncle,
My father's brother! but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month!
Ere yet the ſalt of moſt unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing of her galled eyes,
She marry'd — O moſt wicked ſpeed, to poſt
With ſuch dexterity to inceſtuous ſheets!
It is not; nor it cannot come to good.
But break, my heart, for I muſt hold my tongue,

Rowe, or a French poet, would have flouriſhed away theſe ſtrokes of nature, theſe ſtarts of paſſion, in ſing-ſong flowery ſimiles: But Shakeſpear, with the moſt unbounded imagination, only imitates

nature. Hamlet's character unfolds in this ſpeech, which is one of the fineſt in our immortal poet; we ſee him in this, juſt the character which he preſerves throughout the play. The Tatler juſtly obſerves, that the ſeveral emotions of mind, and breaks of paſſion in it, are admirable. He has touched every circumſtance that aggravated the fact, and ſeemed capable of hurrying the thoughts of a ſon into diſtraction. His father's tenderneſs for his mother expreſſed in ſo delicate a particular; his mother's fondneſs for his father no leſs exquiſitely deſcribed; the great and amiable figure of his dead parent drawn by a true filial piety; his diſdain of ſo unworthy a ſucceſſor to his bed; but, above all, the ſhortneſs of the time between his father's death and his mother's ſecond marriage, brought together with ſo much diſorder, make up

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as noble a part as any in that celebrated tragedy. The circumſtance of time I never could enough admire. The widowhood had laſted two months; this is his firſt reflection: But as his indignation ariſes, he ſinks to ſcarce two months; afterwards, into a month; and at laſt, into a little month: But all this ſo naturally, that the reader accompanies him in the violence of his paſſion, and finds the time leſſen inſenſibly, according to the different workings of his diſdain. I have not mentioned the inceſt of her marriage, which is ſo obvious a provocation; but cannot forbear taking notice, that when his fury is at its height, he cries, *Frailty, thy name is woman!* as railing at the ſex in general, rather than giving himſelf leave to think his mother worſe than others. I may add that natural queſtion which ſuddenly ſtrikes him,

Heav'n and earth!
Muſt I remember?

And when his reflection grows very warm, he again breaks out,

And yet within a month!
Let me not think on't ——

This ſtroke is admirable: But indeed the whole is worked up with great maſtery.

Hamlet's character is finely ſupported even in his pretended madneſs. Through that diſguiſe we ſtill ſee the thoughtful prince; and when he ſpeaks that celebrated ſoliloquy, the reflections are thoſe of Hamlet. In the ſame act, when he is with Horatio, his ſentiments are the noble ones ſo natural to his character:

Should the poor be flatter'd?
No; let the candied tongue lick abſurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee,
Where thrift may follow fawning.

And again he exclaims in a beautiful manner,

Give me the man
That is not paſſion's ſlave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core; aye, in my heart of heart.

When Hamlet ſees the king at prayers, he debates with himſelf whether or not he ſhall kill him then; but ſays,

Am I then reveng'd,
To take him in the purging of his ſoul,
When he is fit and ſeaſon'd for his paſſage?
Up ſword, and know thou a more horrid bent;
When he is drunk, aſleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'inceſtuous pleaſure of his bed;
At gaming, ſwearing, or about ſome act
That has no reliſh of ſalvation in't;
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heav'n,
And that his ſoul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes.

It has been objected againſt this paſſage, that it is too horrible for a prince of Hamlet's character to ſpeak. But ſurely ſo trifling and falſe an opinion will fall

fall to the ground on the ſlighteſt examination. Hamlet's anger and revenge are raiſed by more than human means; his own father, whom he dearly loved, murdered by his uncle, who uſurps his crown, and ſucceds to his bed: This was not all his provocation; his father's ſpirit appears to him, and demands revenge in a ſolemn and awful manner. After this, could any fury which Hamlet expreſſed againſt the murderer, appear unnatural? The virtues which formed his character, muſt neceſſarily tranſport him with more ardor than a common mind was ſuſceptible of; therefore the reflections he makes on ſeeing the king, are extremely natural, and entirely of a piece with his character in general.

I cannot help placing Oſrick's flattery on the weather, ſo well known, in the ſame

ſame rank as the clowns and grave-diggers. There is wit in it; and the proof of the impropriety of it in a tragedy, is the audience always laughing at the paſſage: In fact, it is a comic ſcene. I forbear to mention thoſe characters which are beneath tragedy, ſuch as clowns, fools, &c. They are univerſally condemned by the unprejudiced; but the conſiſtency of Hamlet's character, a diſcerning reader will perceive, is preſerved with the greateſt exactneſs.

Among the other celebrated characters which owe their being to the poet's imagination, we may reckon Lear; for though we are told there did exiſt ſuch a king, yet the portrait is the poet's own; and is one of the brighteſt proofs of that admirable talent of painting nature in the trueſt manner, and ſupporting one of the beſt

beſt drawn characters that ever was invented. No where did this great man's imagination diſplay itſelf in a more exquiſite manner than in the madneſs of Lear *.

When

* Shakeſpear is ſuperior to all other writers in delineating paſſion. It is difficult to ſay in what part he moſt excels, whether in moulding every paſſion to peculiarity of character, in diſcovering the ſentiments that proceed from various tones of paſſion, or in expreſſing properly every different ſentiment. He impoſes not upon his reader general declamation, and the falſe coin of unmeaning words, which the bulk of writers deal in. His ſentiments are adjuſted with the greateſt propriety to the peculiar character and circumſtances of the ſpeaker; and the propriety is not leſs perfect betwixt his ſentiments and his diction. That this is no exaggeration, will be evident to every one of taſte, upon comparing Shakeſpear with other writers in ſimilar paſſages. If upon any occaſion he fall below himſelf, it is not in thoſe ſcenes where paſſion enters. By endeavouring in this caſe to raiſe his dialogue above the ſtyle of ordinary converſation, he ſometimes deviates into intricate thought and obſcure expreſſion:

When a poet founds a tragedy on ſome known event, his principal perſonages

preſſion: ſometimes, to throw his language out of the familiar, he employs rhyme. But may it not in ſome meaſure excuſe Shakeſpear, I ſhall not ſay his works, that he had no pattern, in his own or in any living language, of dialogue fitted for the theatre? At the ſame time it ought not to eſcape obſervation, that the ſtream clears in its progreſs, and that in his later plays he has attained the purity and perfection of dialogue; an obſervation that, with greater certainty than tradition, will direct us to arrange his plays in the order of time. This ought to be conſidered by thoſe who magnify every blemiſh that is diſcovered in the fineſt genius for the drama that ever the world enjoyed. They ought alſo, for their own ſake to conſider, that it is eaſier to diſcover his blemiſhes, which lie generally at the ſurface, than his beauties, of which none can have a thorough reliſh but thoſe who dive deep into human nature. One thing muſt be evident to the meaneſt capacity, that wherever paſſion is to be diſplayed, nature ſhews itſelf ſtrong in him, and is conſpicuous by the moſt delicate propriety of ſentiment and expreſſion.

Elements of Criticiſm, vol. ii. p. 215.

The

ages ought to be drawn as hiſtory relates them. It is unpardonable in a celebrated French author, who has totally miſrepreſented the characters of Cato and Cicero; the firſt is made a mere pedant, and Cicero a vile orator and poltroon. Monſ. Crebillon has acted in the ſame abſurd manner; Cataline, the moſt infamous of mortals, who undertook to cut the throats of all the magiſtrates of his country, and reduce it to aſhes, is painted as a great

The critics ſeem not perfectly to comprehend the genius of Shakeſpear. His plays are defective in the mechanical part, which is leſs the work of genius than of experience; and is not otherwiſe brought to perfection than by diligently obſerving the errors of former compoſitions. Shakeſpear excels all the ancients and moderns in knowledge of human nature, and in unfolding even the moſt obſcure and refined emotions. This is a rare faculty, and of the greateſt importance in a dramatic author; and it is this faculty which makes him ſurpaſs all other writers in the comic as well as tragic vein.

man,

man, who by his abilities, magnanimity, and courage, attracts all the eſteem of the ſpectators *. It would have been abſurd

* Monſ. le Crébillon was intended by his father for the law; but when he went to Paris, he became a frequenter of the theatre; and having an inclination for poetry, attempted a tragedy, on the advice of a friend; it was entitled, La Mort des Enfans de Brutus: He preſented it to the comedians, but was refuſed, to the no ſmall mortification of the author. However he did not deſpair, but wrote another, Idomenée, which was acted for the firſt time in 1705, when Crébillon was thirty-one years of age; it ran thirteen nights. In 1707, he brought his Atrée on the ſtage, which was repreſented eighteen times: the ſubject is ſo terrible, and the character of Atrée ſo fiery, that ſome thought the ſubject too tragic for the French ſtage; but the ſucceſs of it was ſo great, that it fixed the reputation of the poet. In 1706, he married Charlotte Péaget, daughter of a Marchand Apothecaire; upon which occaſion his father diſinherited him, but afterwards retracted. In 1708, he gave his Electre to the public, with great ſucceſs; a noble tragedy, full of the fineſt beauties, and preſented fourteen times. Some unlucky affairs depriving M. de Crébillon of moſt

of

ſurd in Shakeſpear, had he drawn Richard an amiable king; let him have formed

of his fortune, he applied cloſer to poetry. In 1711, he brought on his Rhademiſte, a tragedy in which the characters of Rhadamiſte, Zenobie, and Pharaſmene are ſo original, ſo finely contraſted and admirably preſerved, the majeſtic force of the poetry ſo great, that it was received with tranſport. The actors being obliged to ſuſpend the repreſentation on the death of Monſeigneur, it was afterwards brought again upon the ſtage with almoſt unparalelled applauſe, running in the whole thirty times. This piece introduced the poet to the *grand monde*, and falling into a life of continued diſſipation and pleaſure, it was 1714 before he produced his next piece, which was Xerxès; but ill received. In 1717, he gave his Sémiramis, the ſubject of which piece is but flat; it had only ſeven repreſentations. About this time he formed the idea of a tragedy on the ſubject of Cromwell: He wrote the firſt ſcene, and the harangue of the protector when he preſented Charles I. to the parliament to be tried; but the odiouſneſs of the ſubject made him drop the deſign. In 1726, his Pyrrhus appeared, and was acted ſixteen nights: And in 1731, he was made a member of the French Academy, in the place

formed ever ſo good a piece, yet the abſurdity would have been unpardonable: therefore

place of M. de la Faye. Soon after he had a penſion and a place aſſigned him, which raiſed him from that ſtate of indigence in which he had ſo long laboured. In 1748, his Catilina was firſt acted; he had begun this tragedy twenty years before, and though the greateſt hopes were formed of it by the public, from the firſt ſcene which he recited on his admiſſion into the Academy, yet he had almoſt laid it aſide; but Madame de Pompadour being his patron, he finiſhed it at her requeſt, and it was brought on the ſtage with the greateſt magnificence, before the moſt brilliant audience that almoſt ever appeared: It ran twenty nights; and, though it abounds with many faults, is the maſter-piece of Crébillon. In 1755, he produced his laſt tragedy, Le Triumvirat, when he was eighty-one years old, acted ten times ſucceſſively. He began another, Cléomede, but did not live to finiſh it, dying in 1762. It is amazing, that a man of ſo advanced an age ſhould produce a work of imagination, which has great merit. He was a very amiable character, without either vanity or pedantry; his memory was prodigious, and his claſſical learning polite and extenſive. His ſon, Monſ. Crébillon le fils,

therefore poets muſt conform to the characters as they are drawn to their hands, or at leaſt muſt preſerve the likeneſs.

Both Corneille and Racine * have tranſgreſſed this great rule of propriety: the latter

enjoys ſtill the patronage of M. de Pompadour, and is the author of ſeveral pieces which abound with wit, and too much obſcenity, ſuch as Sofa; Egaremens du cœur & de l'eſprit; l'Ecumoiſe; Tant mieux pour elle.

* As I have often mentioned theſe two celebrated French poets, I will give the reader a tranſlation of la Bruyere's parallel between them. — "Corneille ſubjects us to his characters and ideas; Racine accommodates himſelf to ours: the one repreſents men as they ought to be; the other, as they are. There is in the firſt more what we admire and ought to imitate; and in the ſecond more of what we perceive in others, and feel in ourſelves. Corneille elevates, ſurprizes, controuls, and inſtructs; Racine pleaſes, affects, moves, and penetrates. The former works on us by what is fine, noble, and commanding; the latter inſinuates himſelf into us by the delicacy of his

latter particularly has drawn his Alexander in ſuch ſtrange colours, that the immortal

his paſſions. One is full of maxims, rules and precepts; the other of pleaſing and agreeable ſentiments. We are more enraptured at Corneille's pieces; at Racine's, more ſoftened. Corneille is more moral; Racine more natural. The one ſeems to imitate Sophocles; the other, Euripides."

Oeuvres de Bruyere, tome i. p. 36.

Corneille is more natural than Racine in one ſenſe, viz. as he is leſs ſtudied and laboured, and more careleſs and unaffected. He is more ſolicitous about his thought than his expreſſion; more attentive to the matter than the ſtyle; and the whole of his work than the particular parts of it. His aim is rather to do well than to pleaſe. He follows his genius, without ſtriving to accommodate it to the taſte of the public, and courting the bulk of an audience. On the other hand, Racine is more natural than Corneille in this ſenſe, that he is more equal and uniform, no where forced or extravagant, employs commonly the moſt proper expreſſion, ſcarce ever gives into puniſ or fuſtian, and is more to the level of all capacities than Corneille. The latter frequently thinks, and expreſſes himſelf, in a manner that has ſome-

mortal hero is metamorphoſed into a whining lover; nothing but the name of Alexander remains: We expect to meet with the impetuous conqueror; but are ſurprized to find a character that moves our contempt. St. Evremond characterized him very well, when he ſaid, "He is as indifferent a hero in love, as in war; and thus the hiſtory is disfigured, with out any ornament to the romance. We find him a warrior, whoſe glory cannot influence our courage; and a lover, whoſe paſſion cannot affect our tenderneſs." For ſeveral inſtances of this fault in thoſe two French tragedians, I would refer them to the twenty-ninth ſection

thing bold, daring, and turbulent in it. Racine is always elegant, correct, and orderly: And ſo, an author that was not ſo brilliant and ſo ſingular as the firſt, nor ſo exact and correct as the latter, would appear more natural than either: Such, for inſtance is Homer.

Trublet's Eſſays, p. 339.

of

of the first volume of the abbé du Bos' Reflexions Critiques.

Horace advises us,

Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia finge,
Scriptor. Honoratum si fortè reponis Achillem,
Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
Jura neget sibi data, nihil non arrogat armis.
De Arte Poet.

Homer gives Achilles his character, when he contends for his captive with Agamemnon; but Euripides carried the *fierté* too far, when he represented him so devoid of humanity at the sacrifice of Iphigenia: Homer did not draw him (nor does Horace advise it) thus. The priest seemed to be touched with compassion, but the lover appeared as it were insensible. Our poet Lee has drawn Alexander in almost as ridiculous colours as Racine did; he is a hero, it is true,

but thoroughly mad: The ſoftneſs of the Frenchman's diſpoſition made Alexander a lover; and the violent frantic mind of the Engliſhman drew himſelf, and called the phantom Alexander: Both were in extremes.

As the ſentiments of a perſon in tragedy ſhould always be adapted to his character in general; ſo they ſhould alſo correſpond to his ſituation at the time he ſpeaks them. Alonzo is worked up by Zanga's contrivances to determine to kill his bride; as he enters the bower, where ſhe is aſleep, with a dagger on that deſign, he makes the following addreſs to it:

Ye amaranths! ye roſes, like the morn!
Sweet myrtles, and ye golden orange groves!
Why do you ſmile? Why do ye look ſo fair?
Are you not blaſted as I enter in?
Yes; ſee how ev'ry flow'r lets fall its head!
How ſhudders ev'ry leaf without a wind!

How

How ev'ry green is as the ivy pale!
Did ever midnight ghoſts aſſemble here?
Have theſe ſweet echoes ever learn'd to groan?
Joy-giving, love inſpiring, holy bow'r!
Know, in thy fragrant boſom thou receiv'ſt
A murderer: Oh! I ſhall ſtain thy lillies,
And horror will uſurp the ſeat of bliſs.
So Lucifer broke into paradiſe,
And ſoon damnation follow'd.

This ſpeech, at ſo critical a time, is entirely unnatural. Can it be thought, that if ſuch an action was to be committed on the ſame cauſe, that a man could poſſibly form a flowery addreſs to the bower, juſt at the moment he is going to ſtab his wife that was ſtill dear to him? It may be ſaid, perhaps, that although tragedy is an imitation of the actions of men, yet the neceſſity of the ſtage requires many more words on theſe occaſions than what paſſes in life. Certainly this is true; but ought not theſe ſpeeches

to be as natural as poſſible? the more natural, are they not the more affecting? Shakeſpear, who took nature for his guide, moves us more with a few words which come from the heart, than an inferior poet with the moſt elaborate ſpeeches addreſſed to the imagination. In the Mourning Bride, when Leonora endeavours to comfort Almeira with the thought that time may bring her ſome relief, ſhe replies, in a ſtrain little ſuited to her ſituation,

Oh no! time gives increaſe to my afflictions.
The circling hours that gather all the woes,
Which are diffus'd thro' the revolving year,
Come heavy laden with th'oppreſſive weight,
To me: With me ſucceſſively they leave
The ſighs, the tears, the groans, the reſtleſs cares,
And all the damps of grief that did retard their flight;
They *ſhake their downy wings*, and ſcatter all
The dire collected dews on my poor head:
Then fly with joy and ſwiftneſs from me.

I can-

I cannot help quoting an infinitely natural paſſage from Macbeth, which will ſhew that nothing is ſo affecting as nature itſelf.

Macb. Who's there? — What ho!
Lady. Alack, I am afraid they have awak'd,
And 'tis not done; th'attempt, and not the deed,
Confounds us—hark!—I laid their daggers ready,
He could not miſs 'em — had he not reſembled
My father as he ſlept, I had don't—My huſband!
Macb. I've done the deed — didſt not thou hear a noiſe?
Lady. I heard the owl ſcream, and the crickets cry.
Did not you ſpeak?
Macb. When?
Lady. Now.
Macb. As I deſcended?
Lady. Aye.
Macb. Hark!—Who lies i' th' ſecond chamber?
Lady. Donalbain.
Macb. This is a ſorry ſight. [*Looks on his hands.*

I always thought this picture one of the fineſt paſſages in Macbeth. It is full of thoſe ſtrokes, which, though they may ſeem

ſeem trifling in appearance, are in fact the fineſt ſpeakers of a paſſion; there is a certain awful terror diffuſed through it, that cannot be deſcribed, but which every one, of the leaſt ſenſibility, muſt feel on reading it. The circumſtance of Lady Macbeth's not being able to murder him, becauſe he reſembled her father as he ſlept, is vaſtly natural. Macbeth, ſhocked at the deed he had done, fancies he hears noiſes; the imagination of a man in one of thoſe moments is overwhelmed with terror. Her telling him ſhe heard the owl and the crickets, heightens his fear. He ſtill imagines he hears noiſes, and cries — *Hark!* — And then his looking at his bloody hands, and ſaying — *This is a ſorry ſight* — is the fineſt picture of the workings of a guilty conſcience that ever was drawn. Afterwards, on hearing the knocking, he cries,

Wake,

Wake, Duncan, with this knocking; would thou couldſt!

This is quite natural. A man no ſooner does an atrocious crime, than he repents it. Before it is committed, the aim only is in view; but when once it is done, a thouſand unthought-of terrors pour into his ſoul.

There is a very fine inſtance of this excellency in M. de Voltaire's Zulime, where a ſudden ſtart of paſſion is expreſſed very differently from what is uſual on the French ſtage.

Ramire. —Mais en moi vous ne verriez qu'un traître,
Si tout prêt à partir je cachois à vos yeux,
Un obſtacle fatal, oppoſé par les cieux.
Zul. Un obſtacle! [*avec une ſurpriſe mêlée de terreur.*
Ram. Une loi formidable, éternelle.
Zul. Vous m'arrachez le cœur! achevez. Quelle eſt elle? &c.

This

This laſt line is moſt beautifully expreſſive, and comes directly from the ſoul; and being ſpoke by that admirable actreſs Mademoiſelle Clairon, the ſentiment was delivered with all the pathetic of expreſſion *.—M. de Voltaire has long been one of the moſt celebrated writers in Europe; and he is a ſingular inſtance of an author near fourſcore years of age poſſeſſing almoſt all the fire and vivacity of his youth. The number of pieces, of all kinds, which have flowed from his pen, is ſurprizing. His tragedies have

* This admirable actreſs, whoſe fame is as great as the celebrated Mademoiſelle le Couvre's, is the idol of all Paris. The French poets have addreſſed innumerable copies of verſes to her, and generally give her the title of the *aſtoniſhing Clairon*, the *admirable Clairon*, the *amazing Clairon*. Their dramatic writers, ſince her great powers have been diſcovered, have almoſt conſtantly thrown every thing ſtriking in their pieces, into her part; which conduct has more than once ſaved ſeveral tragedies from being damned.

great

great merit; ſome of them not inferior to thoſe of Racine himſelf: His comedies poſſeſs a vein of true humour. As to his Henriade, that poem, great as its reputation has been in France, is little read, and would not alone have ſecured its author's fame. The abbé Trublet thinks it would have ſucceeded better in proſe; his obſervations are worth tranſcribing: " Le Télémaque eſt encore plus lu que la Henriade; non qu'il vaille mieux, mais il eſt en proſe. La Henriade en eſt plus belle, plus admirable, plus etonnante d'être en vers; le Télémaque en eſt plus agréable d'être en proſe. On a oſé dire de la Henriade, & on l'a dit ſans malignité: *Je ne ſais pourquoi je báille en la liſant.* On a encore appliqué à ce poëme le mot de La Bruyere ſur l'Opéra:

" Je ne ſais pas comment l'Opéra avec
" une muſique ſi parfaite & une dépenſe
" toute

« toute royale, a pu réuſſir à m'ennuyer. »
Et l'on a dit : *Je ne ſais pas comment la Henriade avec une poëſie & une verſification ſi parfaites, a pu réuſſir à m'ennuyer.* Ce n'eſt pas le poëte qui *ennuye* & fait *bâiller* dans la Henriade, c'eſt la poëſie, ou plutôt les vers. Ce ne ſont pas *les François* qui *n'ont point la tête epique*, comme le diſait M. de Malezieu à M. de Voltaire ; c'eſt notre verſification qui n'eſt point épique, parcequ'étant d'une part très difficile, & de l'autre ennuyeuſe à la longue par l'uniformité de la meſure & le retour des mêmes rimes, elle n'eſt pas propre aux longs ouvrages.

J'oſerai donc en faire l'aveu, au hazard de révolter la plupart de mes lecteurs. Je voudrois que M. de Voltaire eût compoſé la Henriade en proſe. Jamais perſonne ne fut plus capable que lui

lui de la ſorte de proſe convenable à un pareil ouvrage, d'une proſe qui auroit toutes les beautés de celle de M. de Fenelon, ſans en avoir le défauts; auſſi coulante, auſſi gracieuſe, & auſſi harmonieuſe, mais plus rapide, plus ſerrée, plus forte, plus fine, plus penſée, plus travaillée. J'ajoute que comme un peu mettre dans un poëme en proſe toute ce qu'on pourroit mettre dans un poëme en vers, mais non réciproquement, on auroit eu dans la Henriade en proſe, tout ce qu'on aime & tout ce qu'on admire dans la Henriade verſifiée, & mille choſes qui n'y ſont pas, qu'on y deſire, que M. de Voltaire lui-même auroit voulu pouvoir y faire entrer, & qu'il a peut-être eſſayé de rendre, mais qu'il a abandonnées, ou par impuiſſance d'y réuſſir, ou par trop de déférence aux ideés communes ſur la nature du poëme épique. A-la-

vérité

vérité l'ouvrage, quoique plus beau en ſoi, auroit fait moins d'honneur à l'auteur, auprès de la plus grande partie du public. Il ne lui eût pas procuré la gloire à la quelle il aſpiroit & qu'il a obtenuë, la gloire d'avoir enfin donné à ſa nation, un beau poëme épique en vers, & j'avoue qu'elle eſt bien flatteuſe.

Depuis que j'ai écrit ceci, j'ai revu la Henriade dans l'édition de Geneve, 1756, ou l'auteur a encore perfectionné ſon ouvrage; & cette nouvelle lecture, bien loin de me faire abandonner mon ſentiment, m'y a encore confirmé. Si j'ai tort, mon tort en eſt plus grand *.

Monſ.

* Eſſais ſur divers Sujets de Litterature, &c. tom. iv. p. 187.

This eſſayiſt was lately admitted a member of the French Açademy: there was an old *difference* between him and Voltaire; but on that occaſion he

Monſ. de Voltaire's hiſtorical pieces have often been attacked on the ſide of truth

he ſent him his ſpeech; and Monſ. Voltaire returned him the following anſwer.

SIR, Ferney.

Your letter and generous procedure prove you not to be my enemy, whatever grounds of ſuſpicion of it your book ſeemed to afford: I chuſe much rather to believe your letter than your book. You had ſaid in print, that I made you yawn; and I declared in print, that you made me laugh: The reſult of which is, that you are not eaſily tickled, and that humour is not my talent. However, between yawning and laughing, you are become my dear brother; ſo, like good Chriſtians and good Academicians, we muſt forget and forgive.

I like your ſpeech very well, Sir; and am ſtill better pleaſed with your goodneſs in favouring me with a copy. As to your letter,

Nardi parvus onyx eliciet cadum.

You will excuſe my quoting Horace; your heroes Meſſ. de Fontenelle and de la Motte, I think, were not fond of him. I muſt plainly tell you, that I was born with as little alloy of ill-nature as yourſelf; and am, at the bottom, a good kind

truth and impartiality, and there has been ſome reaſon for ſuch ſuſpicions. His Age

of man. Indeed, ſome late reflections, that little was got by being ſuch, has given me ſomething of a ſportive vivacious turn; and, I am told, it promotes health. Beſides, I have not thought ſo highly of myſelf, ſo as always to overlook ſome celebrated enemies, who, for forty years together, have ſucceſſively been clandeſtinely and openly labouring my ruin; had I traverſed them in obtaining a mitre, or a place of farmer-general, they could not have uſed me worſe, ſo that if at length I have given them a rap on the knuckles, it was out of pure modeſty. I thought them preciſely on a level with me, and ſo, as Cicero ſays, "in arenam cum æqualibus deſcendi."

Be perſuaded, Sir, that wide is the difference I make between you and them; but I remember, in Lewis the XIVth's time, when I was at Paris, my rivals and I were but dabblers, ſome in verſe, ſome in proſe, ſome half verſe half proſe; indefatigable authors of flimſy compoſitions; ſolemn writers of trifles, ſedulouſly weighing flies eggs in cobweb ſcales. I have ſeen little elſe than low hypocriſy and deceit, and now have a thorough ſenſe of the value of this low ſtate; and in my ſenſe of the lowneſs of every thing elſe, I imitate Horace's Vejanius. Vejanius

Age of Louis XIV. is a defence of that ambitious monarch; and that national partiality,

Vejanius, armis
Herculis ad poſtem fixis, latet abditus agro.

From this receſs it is, Sir, I moſt ſincerely tell you, that I find the *utile dulci* in all your productions; that I heartily forgive any nips you have given me; that I am very ſorry I ſhould ever have ſcratched you; that good-nature is preferable to banter; that your behaviour for ever reconciles me; and that I am, with a real eſteem, as if nothing had happened, my dear brother Academician, very truly, without any compliment,

Your's, &c. VOLTAIRE.

Abbé Trublet's Anſwer. Paris.

SIR, and my very illuſtrious brother Academician, a thouſand thanks to you for the honour of your welcome anſwer: It is very courteous, and no leſs ingenious; and, what is better than both, it is gay and ſprightly. It is a proof of the good ſtate of your health, the only valuable poſſeſſion which remained to be proved in you; long may you enjoy it, together with all the amenities and flame of your genius; this is the

partiality, or rather vanity, ſo ſtrong in the French, abounds in it: However, his ſtyle and manner of writing is admirable; there is ſomething ſo lively and animated in this piece, that ſcarce any are more entertaining. His Hiſtory of Charles XII. is equally amuſing, but much more true. Prefixed to his Hiſtory of Peter the Great, is a long letter to him from Staniſlaus king of Poland, which gives him great encomiums for his veracity and ſurprizing intelligence, and avows the truth of all thoſe parts of the hiſtory,

wiſh even of your very enemies; for amidſt all their rancour againſt your perſon, they are heartily fond of your works; all without exception, at leaſt, if there any to be excepted, I would not be in their caſe. I love the whole, both works and author; and am, with equal eſteem and attachment, Sir, and my moſt illuſtrious brother Academician,

Your moſt humble ſervant,

TRUBLET.

which

which his majeſty could any way be acquainted with. His Eſſay on Univerſal Hiſtory is a moſt beautiful and uſeful performance, full of the juſteſt and moſt penetrating remarks on manners, cuſtoms, and opinions. His Romances are exquiſitely entertaining, particularly Zadig: and whatever may be objected to the *morals* of Candide, every one muſt allow that there is an amazing flow of wit, humour, ridicule, and ſatire throughout the whole piece. The detached pieces and looſe eſſays which have dropped from this lively Frenchman's pen, are entertaining, full of wit, and wrote in a ſpirited ſtyle. This aiming at being univerſal has hurt his reputation, as it ſuffered ſome pieces to eſcape his pen unworthy of it. His Explanation of Sir Iſaac Newton's Philoſophy is but a trifling performance. As to his poetic pieces, many of them are as good as the

language would permit. In ſome of his odes are ſeveral fine ſtrokes, which riſe above the French poetry; nor are his other variety of poems without their luſtre; but his Maid of Orleans is ſcandalouſly indecent.

The variety of diſputes he has had with men of letters, has brought on him a thouſand different attacks, and many of them not ill-founded. He has been often reproached with his avaricious manner of printing his works, and with great juſtice; ſince there is ſcarce a piece he has wrote, but what he has ſold to different book-ſellers incorrectly wrote: When the ſale is pretty well over, out come advertiſements and letters of the villainy of book-ſellers ſtealing his manuſcripts, and promiſing more correct editions *. Monſ. Voltaire

* One of this ſtamp to M. Marmontel I have tranſlated, and ſhall annex it, as it will ſhew in ſome meaſure what I have aſſerted.

SIR,

Voltaire is certainly a writer of great vanity: indeed he has ſome reaſon to be vain;

SIR,

Whatever reluctance a man may feel in ſpeaking of himſelf before the public, and however vain all the little intereſts of an author may be, you will judge, perhaps, that there are circumſtances in which a man who has had the misfortune to write, ought, at leaſt in the quality of a citizen, to refute calumny. It is not of any great importance to the public, that ſome obſcure people have, for theſe ten years paſt, publiſhed their works under the name of an obſcure man like me; but I may be allowed to ſay, that pamphlets from Paris have often been brought to me in my retreat, that bear my name, with the words in the title, *Printed at Geneva.*

I can ſafely proteſt, not only that none of theſe pamphlets are mine, but that nothing is printed at Geneva without the expreſs permiſſion of three magiſtrates; and that all theſe puerilities, to ſay no worſe of them, are abſolutely unknown in that country, where the people are only employed in their reſpective duties, in trade and in agriculture, and where the charms of ſociety are never imbittered by the quarrels of authors.

Thoſe who have thus reſolved to diſturb the repoſe of my old age, have imagined that I live

vain; for, beſides the friendſhip of monarchs and the acquaintance of princes and

at Geneva. It is true, I have long enjoyed a ſtate of retirement, that I might no longer be the butt of the cabals and calumnies, which at Paris are the bane of literature; but it is not true that I am retired to *Geneva*; my natural habitation is ſituated on the eſtate I poſſeſs on the frontiers of France, to which his majeſty has granted privileges and immunities that render thoſe lands extremely dear to me: there my principal employment, as is well known in the country, is to cultivate my fields in peace, and not to be uſeleſs to ſome of the unfortunate. I am ſo far from ſending any work to Paris, that I carry on no correſpondence, directly or indirectly, with any bookſeller, or even any man of letters, at Paris; and, except a kind of tragedy, entitled The Orphan of China, which a valuable friend extorted from me about five or ſix years ago, and of which trifle I made a preſent to the actors of your theatre, I have really done nothing that has been printed in that city.

I was much ſurprized at receiving, laſt December, a ſheet of a periodical pamphlet, entitled, L'Année Literaire, of the exiſtence of which, I, in my retreat, was entirely ignorant. This ſheet was

and *the great*, he has by writing gained a fortune of near two thouſand pounds a year.

He

was accompanied with a ſmall comedy called The Woman in the Right, acted at Karonge, wrote by M. de V. and printed at Geneva.

There are in this title three falſities: That piece, diſfigured as it is by the bookſeller, is certainly not my work; it has never been printed at Geneva; there is no place in that country called Karonge: And I add, that the bookſeller of Paris who has printed it under my name, without my conſent, is very blameable.

But in anſwer to the civilities of the Literary year, I muſt obſerve, that the piece he believes to be new, was played about twelve years ago, at Luneville, in the king of Poland's palace, where I had the honour to reſide. The greateſt perſonages in the kingdom, with reſpect to birth, who are perhaps alſo the moſt diſtinguiſhed by their wit and taſte, played it in the preſence of that monarch: It is ſufficient to ſay, that the marchioneſs du Chatelet acted the Woman in the Right, with univerſal applauſe. I ſhall be ſilent with reſpect to the names of the other illuſtrious perſonages, who are ſtill living, from the fear of offending their modeſty. Such an aſſembly knows, perhaps, as well as the author of the Literary

Year,

He has certainly been the author of ſeveral very generous actions; among others,

Year, what is agreeable pleaſantry, and what decorum. Two thirds of the piece were compoſed by a man, whoſe talents I might envy, had not a juſt indignation for the malice of authors, and the cabals of the theatre, made him renounce an art in which he diſcovered much genius. I performed the laſt part of the work, and at length reduced the whole into three acts, and made ſome ſlight alterations which that form required. This ſmall entertainment of three acts was never deſigned for the public, and is very different from the piece which they have very improperly printed under my name.

You ſee, Sir, that I am not the only perſon who owe thanks to the author of the Literary Year for the fine imputations of which he is ſo laviſh, of *Teutonic coarſeneſs, low ſtuff, and indecency*. The king of Poland, the princes, and ladies of the firſt quality in the kingdom, ought to take their ſhare with equal gratitude; and the reſpectable author who aſſiſted me in this entertainment, ſhould be filled with the ſame ſentiments.

I have enquired what ſort of a piece the Literary Year is, and have been told, that it is a work in which the moſt celebrated perſons, at preſent

others, his treatment of the great Corneille's grand-daughter is very meritorious.

preſent in the literary world, are frequently abuſed; this is a new ſubject for my thanks. I have run over a few pages of the pamphlet, and have found ſome ſtrokes that are a little ſevere againſt M. le Mierre: He is treated as a man void of genius, a plagiary, and a juggler, becauſe that worthy young man has gained three prizes in our Academy, and has ſucceeded in a tragedy, that has been long honoured by the encouraging approbation of the public.

I may ſay, in general, and without having any perſon in view, that a man muſt have a little aſſurance before he can conſtitute himſelf a judge of all works; and that he would do much better, was he himſelf to write ſome good ones.

Satire in verſe, and even in good verſe, is at preſent in diſcredit; and more juſtly ſtill ſatire in proſe, eſpecially when the ſucceſs is as much worſe as it is more eaſy to write it in that pitiful manner. I am here very far from characterizing the author of the Literary Year, who is abſolutely unknown to me. I am told that he has long been my enemy; ſo much the better: For my part, I aſſure you that I know nothing of it.

If

torious. M. le Brun, ſecretary to the prince of Condé, wrote to him, recommending the remains of the family of the great Corneille, the reformer, the creator of the French theatre, and particularly a grand-daughter of that illuſtrious man; at the ſame time inſcribing an ode to him. M. de Voltaire with pleaſure embraced the opportunity of doing good to a family ſo eminent for genius, and wrote the following letter to M. Le Brun.

" HAD I gone about compoſing an anſwer in ſuch fine verſes as yours, four months would have been the ſooneſt you could have heard from me; I muſt there-

If in the preſent criſis of Europe, and amidſt the misfortunes that lay waſte ſo many ſtates, there are ſtill ſome lovers of literature who amuſe themſelves with the good and evil it is capable of producing, I deſire them to believe, that I deſpiſe ſatire, and that I write none.

DE VOLTAIRE.

fore

fore tell you, in plain proſe, how much I admire your ode, and am pleaſed with your propoſal. A veteran of the great Corneille ſhould by no means turn his back on his general's grand daughter; but, after building ſeats and churches, and with poor relations on my hands to maintain, ſmall is the reſidue to aſſiſt, as one would wiſh, a perſon whom the greateſt men of the kingdom alone ſhould have taken under their patronage. As for me, age is come upon me; but I have a niece, who delights in all the arts, and in ſome of which ſhe is not unexpert. If the perſon you ſpeak of, and whom unqueſtionably you know, will accept of the moſt decent education with my niece, ſhe will take a mother's care of her, and I will endeavour to be a father to her; at leaſt, ſhe ſhould be no manner of expence or charge to her own. Her travelling

velling charges ſhall be defrayed to Lyons, and let her be conſigned to M. Tronchin of that city, who will forward her to my ſeat; or one of her own ſex ſhall meet her there, with my equipage. If this ſuits, I only wait her orders: and I hope ſhall, to the end of my life, thank you for giving me an opportunity of doing what ſhould have been done by M. de Fontenelle. One branch of the young lady's education will be, to ſee us ſometimes act a play of her grand-father's; and we ſhall ſet her to embroider the arguments of Cinna and the Cid.

I have the honour to be, &c.

VOLTAIRE.

Voltaire was for ſome years an intimate favorite with the king of Pruſſia, to whom the king of France yielded his allegiance as a ſubject; and at the ſame time the celebrated

celebrated mathematician Maupertuis was in that monarch's good graces. Voltaire eyed him as a rival, and left no ſtone unturned to ruin him with the king; his attempts however failed, and, having uſed no very honourable means, the king baniſhed him for his practices: and finding he had carried away a copy of his poems, arreſted him in his way to France, and recovered the caſket which contained them. Voltaire, however, had another copy, which he afterwards publiſhed, againſt the king's inclinations, under the title of Philoſophe ſans Souci. But as ſeveral of them contained the moſt pernicious opinions in regard to religion and againſt the immortality of the ſoul, the king ordered them to be burnt by the common hangman at Berlin, as they ill-became a monarch who profeſſed being at the head of the proteſtant intereſt in Germany.

Germany. His majeſty not long ſince wrote the following very ſpirited character of this extraordinary Frenchman: "M. de Voltaire is below the ſtature of tall men, or, in other words, he is a little above thoſe of a middling ſize; he is extremely thin, and of an aduſt temperament, hot and atrabilious; his viſage is meagre, his aſpect ardent and penetrating, and there is a malignant quickneſs in his eye: the ſame fire that animates his works, appears in his actions, which are lively even to abſurdity. He is a kind of meteor, perpetually coming and going with a quick motion, and a ſparkling light that dazzles our eyes. A man thus conſtituted, cannot fail of being a valetudinarian; the blade eats away the ſcabbard; gay by complexion, grave by regimen; open without frankneſs, polite without refinement, ſociable without friends:

friends: He knows the world, a
forgets it; in the morning he is A
pus, and Diogenes at night; he
grandeur, and deſpiſes the great:
his ſuperiors, his carriage is eaſy
with his equals, conſtrained: He
polite, then cold, then diſguſting.
loves the court, yet makes himſelf
of it; he has ſenſibility without c
tions, and is voluptuous without p
He is attached to nothing by choic
to every thing by inconſtancy.
reaſons without principle, his reaſ
its fits like the folly of others. H
a clear head and a corrupt heart
thinks of every thing, and treats
thing with deriſion. He is a lib
without a conſtitution for pleaſure
he knows how to moralize, witho
rality. His vanity is exceſſive, b
avarice is yet greater than his vani

therefore writes leſs for reputation than for money, for which he may be ſaid both to hunger and thirſt. He is in haſte to work, that he may be in haſte to live: he was made to enjoy, and he determines only to hoard: Such is the man, and ſuch is the author. There is no poet in the world whoſe verſes coſt him ſo little labour; but this facility of compoſition hurts him, becauſe he abuſes it: As there is but little for labour to ſupply, he is content that little ſhould be wanting, and therefore almoſt all his pieces are unfiniſhed. But though he is an eaſy and elegant writer of poetry, yet his principal excellence would be hiſtory, if he made fewer reflections, and drew no parallels; in both of which, however, he has ſometimes been very happy. In his laſt work he has imitated the manner of Bayle, of whom, even in his cenſure

of

of him, he has exhibited a copy. It has long been ſaid, that for a writer to be without paſſion and without prejudice, he muſt have neither religion nor country; and in this reſpect Mr. Voltaire has made great advances towards perfection. He cannot be accuſed of being a partiſan to his nation; he appears, on the contrary, to be infected with a ſpecies of madneſs ſomewhat like that of old men, who are always extolling the time paſt, and bitterly complaining of the preſent. Voltaire is always diſſatisfied with his own country, and laviſh in his praiſe of thoſe that are a thouſand leagues off. As to religion, he is in that reſpect evidently undetermined; and he would certainly be the neutral and impartial being ſo much deſired for an author, but for a little leaven of Anti-Janſeniſm which appears ſomewhat too plainly diſ-

tinguiſhed in his works. Voltaire has much foreign and much French literature; nor is he deficient in that mixed erudition which is now ſo much in faſhion. He is a politician, a naturaliſt, a geometrician, or whatever elſe he pleaſes; but he is always ſuperficial, becauſe he is not able to be deep. He could not, however, flouriſh as he does upon theſe ſubjects, without great ingenuity. His taſte is rather delicate than juſt; he is an ingenious ſatiriſt, a bad critic*, and a dabbler

* The critical works of Voltaire are but indifferent performances; beſides, he has frequently given very falſe accounts of foreign authors, when he has pretended to a perfect knowledge of their reſpective languages. He reſided two years in England, and even compoſed a trifling eſſay in Engliſh; yet it is plain he did not underſtand ſeveral paſſages in Shakeſpear, or elſe purpoſely miſrepreſented them; and could any one ſuppoſe the following account of the Dunciad to be wrote by a man who pretends to any acquaintance with Mr.

dabbler in the abſtracted ſciences. Imagination is his element, and yet, ſtrange as it is, he has no invention. He is reproached with continually paſſing from one extreme to another; now a Philanthropiſt, then a Cynic; now an exceſſive encomiaſt, then an outrageous ſatiriſt. In one word, Voltaire would fain be an extraordinary man; and an extraordinary man he moſt certainly is!"

No mortal ever poſſeſſed the art of giving his perſonages the ſentiments which

Mr. Pope's works. "Theſe libels (againſt the Engliſh poet) were without end; and as Pope had ſometimes the weakneſs to anſwer them, this ſtill increaſed the cloud. At laſt he himſelf printed a *ſmall abridgement* of all theſe excellent pieces, and this was a mortal blow to the authors who had very honeſtly lived on the injuries they had offered him; for every body ceaſed to read their works, and as they were contented with the abridgement, they never had a reſurrection."
Diſcourſe on Printed Lies.

correſponded beſt with their characters and ſituation, in ſo high a degree as Shakeſpear; all his plays contain ſtriking inſtances of it. At firſt ſight, perhaps, the following ſpeech might be thought extravagant; his Antony makes it to Cleopatra:

Let Rome in Tyber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rais'd empire fall! Here is my ſpace:
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
Feeds beaſt as man; the nobleneſs of life
Is to do thus; when ſuch a mutual pair,
And ſuch a twain can do't; in which I bind
(On pain of puniſhment) the world to weet,
We ſtand up peerleſs.

But when we conſider the character of Antony, it appears quite in character, as that hero's whole life was of a piece with it: in a leſs violent and impetuous man, the ſpeech would have been abſurd; but in Antony it is natural. The following bold metaphors are alſo quite in character,

raſter, when Dryden makes his Antony ſpeak them:

Fool that I was, upon my eagle's wings
I bore this wren, till I was tir'd with ſoaring,
And now he mounts above me.
Good heav'ns! is this, is this the man who braves me?
Who bids my age make way; drives me before him
To the world's ridge, and ſweeps me off like rubbiſh.

But Lee treſpaſſes againſt propriety, when he makes Alcander, in his Oedipus, diſcover himſelf to be a Carteſian:

The ſun's ſick too,
Shortly he'll be an earth.

As Dryden's Cleomenes is acquainted with the Copernican hypotheſis two thouſand years before its invention:

I am pleas'd with my own work; Jove was not more,
With infant nature, when his ſpacious hand
Had rounded this huge ball of earth and ſeas,
To give it the firſt puſh, and ſee it roll
Along the vaſt abyſs *.

* Vide the Guardian, vol. ii. No. 110.

When a poet wants to draw a character of rather a mixed nature, on whom the compaſſion of the audience is to fall, it requires great art to mingle the colours in ſuch a manner that eſteem may not be attracted by a character which really does not deſerve it; and that the ſhades in the picture do not deſtroy that pity which his fate ſhould occaſion. This rule is finely obſerved in the character of Oſman in Zara: the violence of his temper, his paſſionate ſoul, were neceſſary to bring on the cataſtrophe of the piece; but leſt theſe qualities ſhould too much darken his character, the poet has drawn him one of the moſt noble, generous, open-hearted monarchs that ever exiſted, ſhining like a bright ſun in a moſt obſcure firmament; the very contrary to his predeceſſors. Who can fail loving the monarch who ſpeaks to

his

his minister such sentiments as these?

Or should there be a cause
That may require my presence — do not fear
To enter — ever mindful, that my *own*
Follows my *people's* happiness.

And again,

Oraſmin. He waits without? — No Christian dares
approach
This place, long sacred to the sultan's privacies.
Oſman. Go — bring him with thee — Monarchs,
like the sun,
Shine but in vain, unwarming if unseen:
With forms and rev'rence let the *great* approach us:
Not the *unhappy*; — ev'ry place alike
Gives the distress'd a privilege to enter.
I think with horror on the dreadful maxims,
Which harden kings insensibly to tyrants.

When Melidor enters with the letter directed to Zara, and kneels to him, he says,

Come nearer; give it me — To Zara! — rise!
Bring it with speed — shame on the flatt'ring distance.
[Advancing and snatching the letter.

Be

Be honeſt — and approach me like a ſubject
Who ſerves his prince, yet not forgets the man.

I could quote many ſuch glorious ſentiments which raiſe the character of Oſman, and greatly intereſt the ſpectators for his ſucceſs in every thing. Such bright traits in the painting in a manner efface the ſhades of the piece, and occaſion that pity which muſt inevitably attend his fate. Zara, in the Mourning Bride, ſomewhat reſembles Oſman in the heat of her temper, but not having ſuch ſhining virtues, the compaſſion felt at her death is not ſo powerful, nor would the piece permit it. It was neceſſary to paint Othello and Alonzo in very noble colours, or the ſhocking deeds, which the one perpetrates and the other directs, would totally efface all pity. As it is, I never could pity Othello; and what compaſſion the piece occaſions, muſt light

on

on Deſdemona. The abbé du Bos is particulary ſtrenuous againſt theſe enormous crimes. " He who is hurried away by the firſt impulſe of his paſſion to commit a great crime, is always a villain. Paſſion is no excuſe for the voluntary murder of one's wife, not even by the law of poetic morality; the only one here conſidered, and, of all others, the moſt indulgent. Crimes of ſo deep a die are ſo repugnant to hearts not entirely corrupted, that it is not ſufficient to have been deprived in ſome meaſure of one's preſence and liberty of mind in committing them, to avoid being branded as a villain. It is not by dint of reflection, or by withſtanding the temptation, that a man, who has any remains of virtue, avoids committing them; No, it is becauſe he has no ſuch motion in him, as can lead him to commit the like exceſſes; having

having an horror by inſtinct, and, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, a mechanic averſion to all ſuch unnatural actions. If the firſt motion of paſſion could impel him to ſuch crimes, the firſt motion of virtue ſhould be able to withhold him: For have not virtues their firſt motions, as well as our vicious paſſions *?

I avoid

* Celui à qui ſes premiers mouvemens peuvent faire commettre de grands crimes, eſt toujours un ſcélerat. L'emportement n'excuſe point le meurtre volontaire de ſa femme, même ſuivant la morale de la poëſie, la ſeule dont il s'agit ici, & la plus indulgente. De tels crimes répugnent tellément aux cœurs qui ne ſont pas entierement dépravés, qu'il ne ſuffit point d'avoir perdu quelque choſe de la liberté de ſon eſprit pour les commettre, ſans devenir un ſcélerat odieux. Ce n'eſt point par réflexion & en reſiſtant à la tentation qu'un homme à qui il reſte encore quelque vertu ne les commet pas; c'eſt parcequ'il n'eſt pas en lui de mouvement qui le porte jamais à de pareils excès: il eſt en lui une horreur d'inſtinct, & ſi j'oſe dire, machinale, contre les actions dénaturées.

I avoid too many quotations, leſt they ſhould be tedious, but many more might be produced to ſtrengthen the rule of preſerving the characters of tragedy. Giving a variety to the perſonages enlivens the piece, and adds to the entertainment of the ſpectator; and if their ſentiments are not adapted to their manners, the common notions of propriety are ſo offended, that it muſt render a tragedy diſguſting *, inſomuch that nothing but great

turées. S'il y pouvoit être porté par un premier mouvement de colere, un premier mouvement de vertu le retiendroit. Les vertus n'ont-t-elles pas leurs premiers mouvemens ainſi que les paſſions vicieuſes ?

Réflexions Critiques, tome i. § 14.

* Lord Kaimes, ſpeaking of a dramatic poet, ſays, "He ought, over and above, to be acquainted with the various appearances of the ſame paſſion in different perſons. Paſſions, it is certain, receive a tincture from every peculiarity of character, and for that reaſon it rarely happens that any two perſons vent their paſſions preciſely in

great art in the compoſition of the fable, and very good language, can preſerve a piece from oblivion, in which theſe neceſſary maxims are violated.

in the ſame manner. Hence the following rule concerning dramatic and epic compoſitions, that a paſſion be adjuſted to the character, the ſentiments to the paſſion, and the language to the ſentiments. If nature be not faithfully copied in each of theſe, a defect in execution is perceived. There may appear ſome reſemblance, but the picture upon the whole will be inſipid, through want of grace and delicacy. A painter, in order to repreſent the various attitudes of the body, ought to be intimately acquainted with muſcular motion: not leſs intimately acquainted with emotions and characters ought a writer to be, in order to repreſent the various attitudes of the mind. A general notion of the paſſions, in their groſſer differences of ſtrong and weak, elevated and humble, ſevere and gay, is far from being ſufficient: Pictures formed ſo ſuperficially, have little reſemblance, and no expreſſion."

Elements of Criticiſm, vol. ii. p. 150.

SECT.

SECT. VII.

I Shall not have occaſion to be diffuſe in this article, as the language of tragedy is at preſent, and has been for ſome time, better known and more ſtudied than either the fable or ſentiments: Yet it is the leaſt important part in a dramatic poem. As the ſubject is always ſerious, ſo ſhould the language be alſo; ſublime and perſpicuous, without bombaſt and lowneſs. The Engliſh language naturally runs into noble and ſonorous meaſures; ſo that the ſublimity of the language is much oftener met with than that of ſentiment; and without the latter there can be no true ſublimity. The greateſt excellency of Mr. Rowe's tragedies, is the muſical and harmonious verſification; but this technical beauty is not

not adapted in his pieces to the ſeriouſneſs of their ſubjects. In the moſt moving diſtreſs, a flowery, flowing, metaphorical ſtyle is the moſt improper for expreſſing the ſudden ſtarts of paſſion, that affect the reader; it is ſo unnatural for perſons in ſuch a ſituation, to clothe their ſentiments in ſtudied periods, that the fault cannot but diſguſt. After Califta has ſnatched the paper from Horatio and tore it, Altamont comes in and makes this ſpeech, which may be thought *pretty*, but quite in an improper ſtyle for tragedy:

Where is my love, my life, my charming bride,
Joy of my heart, and pleaſure of my eyes,
The wiſh, the care, the bus'neſs of my youth?
Oh! let me find her, ſnatch her to my breaſt!
And tell her ſhe delays my bliſs too long,
Till my ſoft ſoul ev'n ſickens with deſire.

Here is flouriſhing, but nature is forgot. When Horatio tells Altamont ſhe has undone him; that alarming information

from a prudent boſom-friend, only extorts this abſurd, childiſh, and ridiculous ſtummery :

Doſt thou join ruin with Caliſta's name?
What is ſo fair, ſo exquiſitely good?
Is ſhe not more than painting can expreſs,
Or youthful poets fancy when they love?
Does ſhe not come like wiſdom, or good-fortune,
Replete with bleſſings, giving wealth and honour?
The dowry which ſhe brings is peace and pleaſure,
And everlaſting joys are in her arms.

No opportunity would make ſuch ſpeeches as theſe proper in a tragedy; introduced in ſo abſurd a manner as this is, it offends propriety to the laſt degree. The ſame piece would afford an hundred inſtances of the ſame nature. — This is the language of the imagination, not the heart; and he that does not ſpeak to the heart, will never affect us.

Otway, but particularly Lee, were very faulty in their language; every ſentiment,

in the tragedies of the latter, as Mr. Addiſon has obſerved, is loſt in a cloud of words. But Otway ſometimes ſucceeded very well: His Venice Preſerved is wrote in noble language; he is there ſublime and nervous, without degenerating into bombaſt. Dr. Young's ſtyle is very well adapted to tragedy; he is more ſolid than Rowe, and leſs ſwelling than Lee. But Shakeſpear, in the tragic parts of his plays, excels all mankind in the language of tragedy; nature always ſpeaks in him, and the paſſions of the human mind were never yet painted with ſuch exactneſs. When he portrays a monſter or a madman, do they not ſpeak the language adapted to their nature? Was there ever ſuch a character as Caliban drawn in ſuch a maſterly manner, and ſpeaking juſt that language we ſhould expect from ſuch a creature? Lear's madneſs

madneſs is a proof of the vaſt knowledge of our poet in human nature; nothing was ever better imagined, or more admirably expreſſed: Whatever paſſion influences his perſonages, his ſtyle is the language of that paſſion. This is the general character; but there are certainly many exceptions. I may, perhaps, be thought wrong in condemning Hamlet's anſwers to the Ghoſt, while he is ſwearing Marcellus and Horatio on his ſword:

Ah, ha, boy, ſay'ſt thou ſo? Art thou there, Truepenny!
Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellaridge,
Conſent to ſwear.

Well ſaid, old mole, can'ſt work i'th' ground ſo faſt?
A worthy pioneer!

The ſame tragedy would produce numberleſs quibbles and falſe fire, but I forbear to quote them; they are intermixed

with the finest language that could be composed; which makes us astonished at the inequality of Shakespear's genius. Julius Cæsar is composed, almost throughout, in very noble language, but particularly that scene wherein Brutus reproaches Cassius with his weakness, and which concludes with his telling him of Portia's death. Never was any scene more admirably wrote; there is a weight, a majestic dignity of sentiment and language in Brutus, which is amazingly striking. But we may say the same of him as has been said of Homer, his beauties are the effects of his genius, his faults the defects of his age.

As the language should be adapted to the character, so it should vary as particular circumstances require. It was great art in Dr. Young to make Perseus and

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Demetrius, in the Brothers, plead their cauſes with a different kind of eloquence. Demetrius had been educated at Rome, therefore in his ſpeeches we perceive the Roman oratory; and in thoſe of Perſeus, the Grecian. The latter, as Mr. Murphy has obſerved, enters immediately into the matter; his ſentences are ſtrong and nervous, and ſure of convincing the underſtanding by the clearneſs of his diction; he does not condeſcend to addreſs the imagination: It is true he at one time ſheds tears, but this is only to obviate the power of eloquence, which he was aware might be uſed by his brother, who having imbibed the Roman oratory, ſets out in the moſt inſinuating manner, tries the avenues to the paſſions, and endeavours to win his hearers by perſuaſion. I am ſenſible that this beauty may eſcape the multitude; but it is nevertheleſs extremely ſtriking, and compoſed with great art.

If the language of a tragedy is not ſerious and of a certain nobleneſs in the conſtruction, the idea of ſublimity, which we annex to the ſubject, will be diſappointed. A grave and ſerious ſubject cannot, with propriety, be diſcourſed of in a mean or comic ſtyle; one quibble will diſſipate the terror or pity raiſed by a whole ſcene; for nothing can be ſo ſhockingly unnatural as to ſee a laugh in the midſt of a tragic converſation, that ought to inſpire quite different ſenſations; and yet this is the caſe with many tragedies on our theatre.

One particular fault in many of them, is the concluding each act with a ſimile or a ſet of rhymes. Even the chaſte Mr. Addiſon has given into this unnatural cuſtom: a ſimile in rhyme concludes every act in Cato; Rowe always finiſhes with

with rhymes; and even Dr. Young, who wrote againſt the very thing, has given into ſo abſurd a practice. In his Conjectures on original compoſition, he ſays, ſpeaking of Dryden, "But the ſtrongeſt demonſtration of his having no taſte for the buſkin, are his tragedies fringed with rhyme, which in epic poetry is a ſore diſeaſe; in the tragic, abſolute death *."

Addiſon's Cato is one of the beſt wrote tragedies that ever appeared on any ſtage; the language is no where puerile, but always clear and noble, nervous, and in ſome places ſublime; the verſification harmonious, and the conſtruction elegant. I cannot here omit mentioning the excellency of the ſtyle in Mr. Maſon's two dramatic poems, Elfrida and Caractacus; there is in Elfrida in particular, a certain

* Conject. on Orig. Comp. p. 83.

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ſolemnity of diction, that is highly grateful to the ear in tragedy, and would increaſe the pleaſure of an audience to a great degree. The firſt act alſo of Mr. Hill's Zara is extremely well wrote; there is ſomething wonderfully plain and pathetic in it, and is finely adapted to the ſubject.

I ſhall conclude what I have ſaid on tragedy with juſt obſerving, that Ariſtotle judged entirely right, when he ſaid, that tragedy perfectly refines in us all ſorts of paſſions; and certainly no amuſement, of whatever kind, can be turned into a more noble or rational one than that of the theatre. Under proper regulations, it might be made the ſchool of morality and philoſophy; for how powerfully muſt thoſe leſſons work, which are inculcated in ſo pleaſing a form! which influence

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the judgment by affecting the heart. When philoſophy is dreſſed in all the colours that poetry and action can confer, the young will then readily liſten to that inſtruction, which otherwiſe they would have loſt. It is a maxim among orators, that to make their way to the mind, they muſt attack the paſſions: Tragedy raiſes them for a noble purpoſe, to refine them. When virtue is diſplayed in her native charms, and wickedneſs feels the juſt puniſhment of its infamy, what mind can leave the theatre without reflecting on the beauty of one, and the deformity of the other. It is true, this ſublime inſtitution is often corrupted, and led from its original deſign: And when the morals of the ſpectators are as it were at ſtake, ſurely it is a matter important enough for the legiſlature to reform it. This wiſe men would be glad to ſee, but

even

even fools will never expect it. No other inſtitution can in its nature have ſo good an effect as the theatre, under proper regulations; for no other will *entertain* enough to inſtruct. The vivacity of the younger part of mankind require that the precepts of virtue ſhould be cloathed in an agreeable dreſs; they will then have the beſt effect that any method of inſtruction can be attended with, as they will not only form the underſtanding, but pleaſe the imagination.

END of the THIRD VOLUME.

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